

## The Ballad of Mona Lisa

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## The Ballad of Mona Lisa

by [owl\\_lover013](#)

### Summary

It has been five years since Peter Parker's "death." In those five years, the world has kept turning, causing Peter's world to flip upside down seemingly overnight. Mr. Stark and Miss. Potts got married and have a five-year-old daughter named Morgan--who has grown up on exaggerated stories about the greatness of Spider-Man, stories that Peter can't live up to. May and Happy also married each other during the Blip--the name being used to call the five years half the population missed. Needless to say, Peter is struggling to find where he belongs in this new world. But, he has always persevered through the difficulties life gave him, and he can make it out of this one as well, right? And if he needs the help of an up-and-coming hero named Mysterio...well, no one can fault him for that one, right?

### Notes

This is my first-ever fanfiction, so please be patient with me as I try to figure the site out. I have worked on this story for the past five months, so I am extremely excited to share this with you. I have finished the story, so I will update on a weekly schedule. I hope you enjoy reading this story!

# Prologue

## Chapter Notes

The inspiration behind this story is the song The Ballad of Mona Lisa by Panic! At the Disco, which is what the story is named after. Each part name will be lyrics from the song.

## Part One

*A lonely speaker in a conversation*

*Monday, April 23, 2018*

When Peter had followed Mr. Stark into space, this wasn't what he imagined. He wasn't quite sure what he was expecting, but it definitely involved helping Mr. Stark. However, it seemed that he had failed at the task. He had failed to get the gauntlet off of the big purple dude (he guessed that he was Thanos, the person that everyone was so freaked out about) and he had to watch, helpless, as Thanos stabbed Mr. Stark. He really thought that that was the worst that could happen, but then Mr. Doctor Strange gave Thanos the time stone. Peter wasn't quite sure what giving up the stone meant, but he definitely knew that it wasn't good news. Then, before anyone could stop him, Thanos disappeared.

All-in-all, Peter was seriously regretting his decision to follow Mr. Stark. He had thought that what they were experiencing was the worst thing that could happen. They failed to defeat Thanos on Titan and, now, they could only hope that Earth could survive Thanos' visit. Peter tried not to imagine a world where the Avengers lost. Because that was impossible, right? They were the Avengers. Nothing could stop them. (Peter tried to forget the fact that Thanos had easily defeated Mr. Stark, the Guardians, a wizard, and him.) No, nothing else would go wrong.

But then it did. Peter felt that tingle on the back of his neck that signaled danger and watched as, one by one, the Guardians turned to dust. His sixth sense was absolutely screaming at him, loud enough that Peter had trouble hearing his own thoughts, let alone whatever Mr. Doctor Strange said before he, too, faded into nothing. And that's when Peter felt the pain. It felt like his healing abilities were trying to heal something, but Peter didn't know what it was healing. Did he get hurt? He didn't think so, but he could be wrong. But, even more troubling, it felt like something was preventing his body from healing, a feat that Peter didn't think was possible.

"Mr. Stark?" Peter called, holding his stomach. The pain was increasing every second. "I don't feel so good."

Mr. Stark turned around, his face falling as he seemed to notice the pain that Peter was in. "Kid?"

At this point, it felt like Peter's entire body was coming apart and that his healing ability was trying (and failing spectacularly) to knit himself back together. He looked down at his hands, his panic growing as he noticed a piece of dust drifting away from it. Was he fading, too? Was he about to meet the same fate as the Guardians and Mr. Doctor Strange? "I-I don't know what's happening."

"You're going to be alright, kid," Mr. Stark said.

He stumbled over to Mr. Stark, unable to keep his balance though the pain and panic that he was experiencing. Peter fell into Mr. Stark's arms and he realized that the end was actually here. But he didn't want it to come. He was only sixteen; he hadn't even graduated from high school. He had never told MJ that he liked her.

Peter latched onto Mr. Stark, desperate to stay. "I don't want to go," he said. "Please. I don't want to go. I don't want to go, *please, sir.*" He repeated the phrase over and over again, everyone he loved flashing before his eyes. May saying "I larb you"; Ned freaking out as he explained that he was Spider-Man; MJ smirking as she showed him a sketch of him that she drew; Mr. Stark helping him with the web formula. Peter didn't want to leave them behind. He didn't want to go. He didn't want to go. He didn't want to go. *PleasesirIdon'twanttogo.*

Peter felt his legs going out from underneath him. He couldn't feel them anymore. Did that mean that they had already turned into dust? Like the rest of him was about to do? His mantra stopped and he realized that there was no way to prevent this. Again, he regretted his stupid decision to follow Mr. Stark into that stupid spaceship. Peter realized that he never did apologize for that. Nor did he apologize for failing to remove the gauntlet from Thanos' hand. If he had done that, maybe this wouldn't be happening right now. Peter looked up at Mr. Stark's face, shocked to see the man's eyes filling with tears. He realized that he was the one causing Mr. Stark's pain. If he wasn't currently dying, there would be no reason for Mr. Stark to cry.

"I'm sorry," Peter said. And he meant it. He was sorry for not following Mr. Stark's instructions; for failing Mr. Stark; for causing Mr. Stark to cry. He looked away from Mr. Stark, preparing himself for the end. Preparing himself for when he saw his mother and father and Uncle Ben again. After wishing that Mr. Stark and May would move on after he left, Peter closed his eyes, embracing the darkness that came with it.

...

Seconds later, Peter opened up his eyes.

"--ter?" someone asked. He felt someone shaking him and turned to see Mr. Doctor Strange crouching next to him. "Peter, can you hear me?"

Peter nodded, groaning as he sat up. He blinked as he tried to remember what had happened for him to end up passed out on a dusty and destroyed planet. As he began to remember, he looked around for Mr. Stark. Not seeing him, Peter turned back to face the wizard. "Where's Mr. Stark?"

Mr. Doctor Strange stood up, turning back to face the newly revived Guardians. On that note, how were they still alive? How was the wizard still alive? Didn't they turn to dust? Just like Peter did himself just seconds ago? But wait. If he was still alive, did he actually turn to dust? Maybe he just passed out. But that still didn't explain the disappearance of Mr. Stark or that blue robot lady (he really couldn't remember names that well).

Peter stood up, wincing. He was still sore from that big fight they had with Thanos. "Mr. Doctor Strange? Did you hear me? Where's Mr. Stark?"

The wizard ignored him, waving his hands around. Yellow portals began to pop up around them. With his continued silence, Peter began to hypothesize all the things that could have happened to Mr. Stark. Maybe his mentor had turned to dust as well, but didn't return like Peter had. Or maybe Thanos had come back after Peter died, and had killed Mr. Stark. All that and more flooded Peter's brain, unwanted hypotheticals flashing through his mind.

Quill joined Peter in asking the wizard questions. "Yeah, dude? Where's Stark and Nebula?"

*Nebula!* Peter thought. *That was the name of the blue robot lady!*

Mr. Doctor Strange sighed, turning to face them. “I don’t have time for the questions. Our universe is in a delicate state of balance. One wrong move will cause our universe to cease to exist. Wasting time with an explanation will take too long.” He turned around to continue his portal building thingy.

*What was that supposed to mean?* Peter wanted to ask, but he refrained from asking. Quill, it seemed, didn’t have the same self-discipline.

“Look, I get it that you want to be cyprict and all,” Quill said. “But what the hell happened? I just turned to dust; I think I deserve to know.”

“Fine.” The wizard turned around, clearly annoyed. “Thanos snapped, causing half the universe to die, including the five of us. The remaining Avengers figured out how to undo the Snap, but it took them five years to do so. While undoing the Snap, they gained the attention of 2014 Thanos and are now in a battle with him, a battle that will alter the course of our universe forever.”

He turned back around and, this time, no one bothered him. Peter struggled to comprehend what Mr. Doctor Strange had just said. Not only did he die, but half the universe died? He began to worry if Aunt May, Ned, or MJ had been a part of that half. God, he hoped not. Peter could've sworn that only seconds had passed since he had, well, *died* (that was a weird thought), but the wizard had said that five years had passed. Five years that Aunt May, Mr. Stark, and all his friends had spent grieving. Five years of history and culture that he had missed. He wondered briefly about the new *Star Wars* movies that he must've missed. Did Ned watch them without him? Or did he not, not wanting to watch them without Peter? Or was he not given the chance to, since he died like Peter had? Briefly, Peter hoped that Ned did die, so they could experience the weirdness of being resurrected together. He squashed that hope quickly, feeling guilty that he had just wished that his best friend was dead.

Mr. Doctor Strange turned to face Peter and the Guardians. “It is time,” he said, cryptic as usual. “The future of our universe rests in our hands.” Seeing their confused faces, he rolled his eyes. “The Avengers need us. Follow me.”

...

The next thirty minutes or so passed quickly for Peter. Later, he would only be able to remember flashes of it. Flashes of him fighting alongside the rest of the Avengers (which, Peter had to say, had grown exponentially). Flashes of passing the gauntlet around, playing some twisted game of hot potato. There were some people that Peter recognized (like the giant guy from the fight Mr. Stark had invited him to and Captain America); some people that Peter had heard of, but never actually met (like Thor and the Hulk); and still other people that Peter hadn’t recognized at all (like the woman on the winged horse and the blonde woman who had taken the gauntlet from him after saving his life). Yet there were some things that Peter thought that he would never, ever forget.

Like seeing Mr. Stark. To Peter, the man was just holding him minutes ago while he faded into nothing. To Mr. Stark, it had been five years of thinking that Peter was dead. Peter felt sad that Mr. Stark had to live without him. He had only known him for a year and a half (or was it six and a half years now?), but Peter knew that Mr. Stark was someone special to him and that he was someone special to Mr. Stark. Hell, Peter would even say that he saw Mr. Stark as something more like a father. And the feeling was mutual, Peter realized, when he saw Mr. Stark’s face pale as he saw Peter. He looked like he had seen a ghost (which maybe Peter was a ghost, since he *was* supposed to be dead).

Peter rushed up to Mr. Stark, helping him up. "Do you remember when we were in space?" he asked, not wasting any time in explaining what had led him to be standing in front of Mr. Stark. "And I got all dusty? Well, I must've passed out something"--a much better explanation than "I died and then I was revived;" an explanation that would definitely freak Mr. Stark out--"cause I woke up and Mr. Doctor Strange was there. And he said 'Come on, kid. It's been five years'"--well, he didn't exactly say that, but Mr. Stark didn't need to know the long and, frankly, confusing story of what had really happened after he was revived--"then, he started doing the yellow sparkly thingy that he does," Peter said, gesturing with his hands to show Mr. Stark what yellow sparkly thingy he was talking about.

Before he could continue the rest of his story, Mr. Stark pulled him into a hug. Peter froze, his mind jumping back to when he had first met Mr. Stark.

*They were in a car, just outside of Peter's apartment building. Peter was sitting next to Mr. Stark, just about to get out. Before he did so, though, Mr. Stark reached towards him. Peter gave him an awkward hug, figuring that hugging him was the reason why Mr. Stark was leaning towards.*

*"Oh, this isn't a hug," Mr. Stark said. Peter felt his cheeks flush up in embarrassment as he pulled away from the man. "I'm just grabbing the door for you. We're not there yet."*

Well, it seemed that they were there now. Peter hugged him back, saying, "This is nice."

The next big thing that Peter would never, ever forget was Mr. Stark dying. Well, he didn't actually die, but it was too close of a call for Peter.

"I am inevitable," Thanos said, snapping his fingers. Nothing happened and Peter would've laughed at the comical expression on his face except Mr. Stark had the gauntlet on.

"And I am Iron Man," Mr. Stark said, carefully enunciating each word, as if each one were a struggle for him.

Peter felt his world collapse as he watched Mr. Stark fall to the ground. He thought he screamed the word "No!" but he wasn't entirely positive about that fact. He rushed to where he had seen Mr. Stark sit down. Colonel Rhodes was already there.

"Mr. Stark?" he asked timidly, like a scared little kid. "Hey." He rushed forward to crouch down beside his mentor. "Mr. Stark? Can you hear me?" Mr. Stark didn't respond, staring unfocusedly at Peter. "It's Peter." Still, there was no response from his mentor. Tears gathered in Peter's eyes, threatening to fall. He blinked them away, instead trying to get the man to answer him. "We won, Mr. Stark." He paused again before repeating his sentence. "We won, Mr. Stark. We won. You did it, sir, you did it." Mr. Stark's head tilted to the side, but he still didn't respond to Peter. This time, Peter couldn't stop the tears falling from his face. "I'm sorry, Tony," he said softly, apologizing for not being able to prevent Tony from dying. He had the gauntlet only moments ago. He should've been the one to use it, not Tony. Then Miss. Potts was there in a blue Iron Man suit. Colonel Rhodes helped Peter stand and they stood off to the side. Peter didn't hear the words coming out of Miss. Potts' mouth nor did he feel Colonel Rhodes' hand on his shoulder. All he felt was the grief rising up in him as he watched yet another family member die. All he heard was Tony's heartbeat growing weaker and weaker. Dimly, he wondered when Mr. Stark had become Tony in his mind. Finally, he heard a sound and saw a sight that he would never forget. It was the sound of Tony's heart stopping, never to be heard again; and the sight of his arc reactor going out, never to be lit again.

# Chapter One

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

### Part One

*A lonely speaker in a conversation*

???

After watching Mr. Stark die, Peter found himself sitting on a hospital bed, not having a clue as to how he got there. Nurses and doctors wandered around him, trying to ask him if anything hurt, but Peter didn't respond. He felt nothing, yet he knew that response would only cause them to freak out. Miss. Potts eventually came in, asking to be alone with Peter. The other people in the room disappeared, but Peter didn't notice their absence. He didn't even acknowledge Miss. Potts' arrival, something that May and Uncle Ben had always stressed the importance of.

"Hey, Peter," she said, smiling. "I have some good news."

He looked up at that, wondering what would be considered good news in the wake of Tony's passing.

"Tony's alright," she said. Peter stared at her uncomprehendingly. "Tony's going to be alright."

"I-is he alive?" Peter croaked out, hoping for an answer that he knew she wasn't going to be able to say.

Miss. Potts smiled weakly, pursing her lips, obviously choking back tears. She nodded.

"He's alive?" Peter asked again, not believing her answer.

Tears of relief began to fall out of Miss. Potts' eyes as she pulled him into a hug. "Yes, Peter. He's alive and he's going to be alright."

Peter didn't concern himself with the how, only basking in the gloriousness of the what. He also felt tears falling down his face as he held tightly onto Miss. Potts, unable to say or do anything else. Minutes passed before he finally pulled away from her, wiping at his face.

"Can I see him?"

She nodded. "He just woke up from surgery so he might be a little out of it."

"Surgery?"

"Yeah. They had to amputate his right arm. It took too much radiation when he Snapped."

Peter looked away from her, feeling nauseous. Tony had lost his arm in order to save the universe? "But they said that he'll be okay, right?"

"Yes. He might get a prosthetic arm, but he'll be okay."

For some reason, that struck Peter as funny. He laughed. "So he'll be like the Winter Soldier?"

Miss. Potts blinked before she joined Peter's laughter. "I suppose he will be."

Peter followed Miss. Potts out of the hospital room, feeling lighter than air. Tony was alive. Tony was alright. *Tony was alive and he was alright.* Peter could feel again, but the only thing he felt was overwhelming happiness. He wanted to tell everyone and everything what had happened. *Tony was alive and he was alright.*

They made it to what must have been Tony's room and Peter paused before entering. The last time he had seen Tony was when Tony's heart had stopped. What was to prevent that from happening again the moment when he entered the room? And what about the time on Titan, when Peter had faded into dust? Was that going to happen again when he saw Tony? Peter felt his breathing pick up. Miss. Potts seemed to notice his hesitation, because she reached a hand out for his.

"Come on, Peter," she said, smiling welcomingly. "Everything's fine. Nothing's going to happen." He nodded and took Miss. Potts' hand, letting her lead him into the room.

The curtains on the windows were closed, but the lights overhead were on, providing enough light for Peter to see. Tony was sitting up on the bed, watching the TV that was in the corner of the room. He looked over at Peter and Miss. Potts as they entered, smiling.

"Pete." Tony said. Even though it was only one word, it was enough to send Peter into a crying fit. He rushed over to Tony and hugged him, unable to say anything else. Tony didn't say anything, either, but he did return Peter's hug, wrapping one arm around him.

Wait, one arm? Peter pulled away, finally noticing Tony's bandaged right shoulder. Where an arm should rest was just air. Suddenly, Peter remembered Miss. Potts told him that they had to amputate Tony's arm, but it appeared that Peter had forgotten that in light of the overwhelming relief he felt at Tony surviving.

Tony noticed Peter's stare and he nudged Peter to look back up at his face. "Pete?"

Peter looked back up at Tony, surprised at the tears in the man's eyes. "Yeah?"

"It's good to see you, kid."

Peter smiled, hugging Tony again. "It's good to see you, too, Tony."

Tony laughed. "Oh, so I'm 'Tony' now? Did I hear you right? All it took was me almost dying for you to call me by my first name?"

Peter laughed as well. "Tony's not really your first name, though. I thought it was Anthony?"

"I swear to God, Peter, if you call me Anthony, I will kill you."

Peter laughed, quickly joined by Tony seconds later. After they finished laughing, they sat together in silence.

Suddenly, Peter noticed that Miss. Potts had left the room. "Where did Miss. Potts go?"

Tony looked at him in confusion. "Miss. Potts? Do you mean Pepper?"

"Who else do you think I mean?" Peter retorted.

"Hey, don't be smart with me. Besides, she's not really Miss. Potts anymore. It's Mrs. Stark now."

This time, Peter was the one to look confused. "Wait, you two got married? When? That was

supposed to be in December! I was going to be the ring bearer!”

Tony looked away from Peter and Peter remembered (how had he forgotten in the first place?) that he had been dead for five years. Tony and Miss. Potts (who was Mrs. Stark now) must’ve still married December of 2018, just not with Peter around. His guess was proven correct by what Tony said next. “We married five years ago, still in December. If you want, we can renew our vows and you can be the ring bearer in that ceremony.”

“No, no, it’s okay,” Peter quickly said. “You don’t have to go through that trouble.”

Tony frowned. “Kid, it’s not a problem. I would love it if we did that.”

“Yeah?”

“Yep.” They sat in silence after that, simply enjoying the presence of the other person. Peter still found it hard to understand that he had been gone for five years and hadn’t even realized it. He looked at the TV, realizing that Tony was watching the news. He jolted when he noticed the date in the corner of the screen.

## **AUGUST 26, 2023.**

The year was 2023. And the month was August, a full four months later than Peter had thought. Not to mention, he had missed his birthday by sixteen days. Peter closed his eyes, suddenly grieving for the five years and four months he had missed. He was supposed to graduate in 2019. Peter had missed a major milestone in his life, a milestone that he had been working towards for his entire life. Not to mention his eighteenth birthday *and* his twenty-first birthday. He had missed *six* birthdays, *five* Christmases, *five* New Year’s parties, *five* everything. It felt like an eternity that Peter had missed. He flashed back to his life five years ago (or, more accurately, *ten* years ago) and found that he was 11. If he had missed life from when he was 11 to when he was 16, he would’ve missed a huge amount of time. All of middle school. The start of high school. Being bit by that spider. Uncle Ben’s death. Becoming Spider-Man. Meeting Tony. Fighting the Avengers in Germany. Fighting crime. Fighting Vulture. Being dropped in a lake and almost dying. Finding out that his homecoming date’s dad was trying to kill him. Being crushed by a building, almost dying again. Crashing a plane. Going to space. Almost dying. Becoming an Avenger. Fighting some more people. Almost dying for the millionth time. Actually dying in Tony’s arms.

It was a lot and those five years were monumental for Peter. Who was to say that the next five years after that would have been just as important? Or perhaps even *more* important? But Peter would never know, since he had died. Peter wondered if this was how Captain America had felt when he had woken up in 2011. If so, Peter definitely did not envy him. It was mind-bending and it hurt to think about. Tony seemed to notice the thoughts running through Peter’s mind because he looked at him in concern.

“You okay, Pete?”

Peter attempted to smile, but it felt fake, even to him. “Yeah. Just a lot to take in.”

Tony nodded. “I get it. If it helps, not that much happened.”

“I find that hard to believe.”

“No, seriously. Everyone lost someone and it was hard to bounce back from that. The world just... stopped. People didn’t want to move on without half of the population and didn’t feel like doing anything. However, some good did come out of it. The ozone in the atmosphere was replenished.



We weren't burning as much fossil fuels as we did before, leading to cleaner air and cleaner oceans."

Peter bit his lip, understanding what Tony was saying. Yeah, he missed a huge part of human history, but it was always better to look on the bright side. He'll get through it. Just like he always did. "Thanks, Tony," he said. "That was helpful."

"Anytime, kiddo. Anytime."

At that moment, Mrs. Stark walked in with a little girl following behind her. The girl seemed to be around four or five, causing Peter to frown. The girl's hair was the same exact shade as Tony's. And when she faced him and Tony, Peter noticed that her eyes were the same color as Tony's and had the same mischievous gleam in them. Was she--

"Daddy!" she cried, pouncing onto Tony's lap, not caring that Peter was sitting beside Tony. Yep. The little girl was Mr. Stark's daughter.

"Morguna!" Mr. Stark said, giving her a big hug. "Where did you come from?"

"Mommy called Aunt May and Uncle Happy and they came up to the cabin and then they took me here when Mommy told them that you were hurt and Peter was back." Peter blinked at the use of Aunt May in conjunction with Happy's name. Was Morgan's Aunt May the same as Peter's Aunt May? If so, did that mean May and Happy *got married*? No, that didn't happen. It couldn't have happened. Peter refused to believe that. Morgan turned to face Peter. "Are you Peter? You look like him."

Peter was speechless, unable to say a single word. The bluntness of the question threw him off guard and he wondered what she meant when he looked like Peter, as if she had seen him before. How, when Peter had never met her before or heard of her before?

Mr. Stark spoke up. "Yep, Morguna. This is Peter, your big brother that I always tell you about. Peter, this is your little sister, Morgan."

Morgan waved at Peter, oblivious to how panicked Peter felt. Did Mr. Stark say "little sister"? As in, Mr. Stark considered him as family? While Peter had always thought of Mr. Stark as something more than a mentor, Peter never really thought that he was a part of Mr. Stark's family. And what did Tony mean when he said "that I always tell you about"? Just how much did Mr. Stark mention him to Morgan for Morgan to know who he was right off the bat? And just how much did he explain to her? Everything? Like, Spider-Man everything? Morgan confirmed his suspicions with her next words.

"Are you really Spider-Man?" she asked. "'Cause I always thought you would look a bit more spidery."

Peter tried to calm himself down. Really, it was only a four-year-old kid. What would be the harm in explaining who he was to her? "I sure am. And I act like a spider; I don't look like one."

She looked excited, practically vibrating with excitement. "How? What can you do? Can you show me? Please?"

Peter laughed at the excitement in her tone. "Maybe later, Morgan."

Morgan turned sad, surprising Peter with how quickly she switched emotions. "But I want to see! Show me now!"

Mr. Stark rubbed a comforting hand on her back. “Petey said later so we’ll wait to see later. Besides, he’s gotta go see his aunt.” Mr. Stark looked up at Mrs. Stark. “She and Happy are here, right?”

There it was again. May and Happy’s names were said together. What did it mean? Suddenly, Peter began to worry about seeing Aunt May. Their last conversation occurred five years ago, when she told him to have fun on his field trip to MoMA.

Mrs. Stark nodded. “They’re here. May wanted to talk to Peter in private instead of coming in when we were all in here.”

Why would May want to talk in private? Didn’t she want to see him as soon as possible? Peter cursed his overthinking habit. It probably was nothing and he was psyching himself up over nothing.

Peter stood up. “Where is she?”

“Just outside.”

Peter nodded, forcing himself to walk out of the room. He shut the door behind him, providing the Starks with a bit more privacy. Just outside, as Mrs. Stark had told him, stood May, pacing the hallway. She turned when Peter walked out. Instead of launching into an angry tirade as he had feared, she simply hugged him. Peter hugged her back, drinking in her presence.

“Hey,” Peter said, swallowing back the tears that were caught in his throat.

“Peter,” she breathed. “Oh, Peter.” She pulled away from him, smiling at him. As she spoke, tears continued to fall down her face. “I couldn’t believe it when I heard. When Pepper had called me to ask if I could watch Morgan for her, she had explained what Tony was planning. I didn’t think that it would actually work. And then, at work, people began appearing everywhere. And I thought that maybe you had come back. Pepper called me and I was so happy to hear that you came back. You’re alive, Peter. You’re alive.” She sobbed harder, hugging him again.

Peter hugged her back, crying as well. “Yeah, I’m alive.”

They stood like that for several minutes, May silently shaking with sobs while Peter provided support for her to hold onto, silent tears running down his face. They both simply breathed in the presence of each other. It was just the two of them, their little two-person family that had been taking on the world together. After standing like that for a long time, Peter reluctantly stepped back. May seemed to share in his reluctance.

“I heard Mr. Stark and Miss. Potts got married.”

May nodded. “They did it a few months after...”

Her voice trailed off, but Peter could easily fill in the gap in her words. *After half the world died.* “And they have Morgan.”

“Yeah, that little rascal,” May laughed. “She is so like Tony, sometimes. She’s so stubborn. And she has her mother’s determination, so you can imagine what that’s like.”

Peter smiled, thinking back to when Morgan was begging to see his Spider-Man skills. She was definitely stubborn and determined. “I think I’ve already seen it.”

May laughed, but her facial expression quickly turned somber. “I guess since we’re on the subject

of how things have changed that I shou--"

At that moment, Happy appeared, grumbling like he always did. "You have no idea how rude that wizard was, May. Wouldn't answer any of my..." Then, he noticed Peter. "Kid," he said simply.

"Hey, Happy," Peter replied, getting ready for the Happy grumpiness he was about to be hit with. Instead, Happy pulled him into a hug. Huh. Seems like the people least likely to hug him just kept hugging him. First Mr. Stark and now Happy.

"Kid," Happy repeated, his voice thick with emotion.

"Still here," Peter mumbled beneath Happy's hug.

Happy pulled away from him and straightened his jacket. Acting like nothing had happened, he quickly turned back to the Happy Peter knew. "Don't you dare do that again."

Peter stared at him in shock. "What? What did I do?"

"Oh, like you don't know? You know exactly what I'm talking about and I'm telling you to not do that again."

"Happy, I have no idea what you're talking about. But whatever I did, I'm sorry."

"Well, if you're sorry, then you do know what I'm talking about. So don't do it again."

"Happy, what are you--"

May's laughter cut their conversation off. Both of them turned to see her looking amusingly at them. Seeing their confused expressions, she stopped laughing. "Sorry. I just missed you two doing...well, whatever you just did."

"We weren't doing anything," Happy said. "I was just establishing a new rule for the kid."

"Oh, come on, Happy!" Peter said indignantly. "I don't need a new rule!"

"Oh yes you do. You went to space! I thought that was against your whole...your whole thing!"

"My whole thing? What are you talking about?"

"You know exactly what I'm talking about! Weren't you the one that told Tony that you just wanted to be a friendly neighborhood Spider-Man all those years ago when he offered to make you into an Avenger?"

"All those years ago? Happy, that was, like, two years ago!"

"Uh, no? Last I checked that conversation happened in 2016, a whole seven years ago!"

Peter stared at Happy in shock, yet again forgetting the whole five years that he missed. How? How did he keep forgetting?

"Yeah," Peter said, stepping away. "Yeah, you're right. It was years ago." He turned away, not wanting to talk about the emotions rolling like a raging sea inside of him.

"Honey, wait," May called after him.

Peter turned back around. "I think I'm just going to go to bed now. I've been up for, well, for five

years now. I'm exhausted." He gave a weak chuckle, trying to ease their concerns. Judging by their expressions, he wasn't fooling anyone. And what he said wasn't necessarily a lie. He had fought two battles today, went to space, and came back from space. Not to mention how emotionally draining his day was, from dying to watching Mr. Stark almost die to finding out that he had missed five years of his life.

May frowned. "Do you want to eat first?"

Peter started to shake his head and walk away, only to realize that he hadn't been paying attention when Mrs. Stark had led him to Mr. Stark's room. He had no idea how to get back to his own room or if it was still his room. Was he allowed to leave the hospital or was he stuck here? And where, exactly, was here? Maybe he should answer those questions first, before he went to sleep. And May was right; it might be better to eat first before passing out.

"On second thought," Peter said, turning back to face May. "Maybe eating first would be a good idea."

...

They ended up going to the cafeteria, deciding to eat with just them instead of eating with the Starks. To Peter, "just them" meant him and May, but, apparently, "just them" included Happy as well, since Happy followed them down to the cafeteria. Not that Peter minded. Happy was cool. Peter wanted to ask why Happy was joining them, but he figured it would be rude to ask in front of the man. He supposed that he was just filling in his position as security for Peter.

Once in the cafeteria, Peter stopped, surprised at the sight in front of him. The cafeteria had big windows that went from the floor to the ceiling, letting in the deep orange color of the sunset. It showed plainlands like those that were in Africa, confusing Peter. Why was he in Africa? He thought that the final battle against Thanos had taken place near the Compound, in upstate New York.

Seeing how confused he was, May hurried to ask him what was wrong.

"Where are we?" he asked.

The question seemed to startle May. "You don't know where you are?"

Peter shook his head hesitantly. "N-no. I can't really remember anything after...after the battle. I'm sorry."

"It's alright. We're in Wakanda right now."

"Wait, really?" Peter had heard stories about Wakanda, about the scientific advances of Wakanda. As a science geek, Peter was absolutely freaking out. "We're in Wakanda? How?"

May smiled at his excitement. "King T'Challa opened his borders to those who fought in the battle and Doctor Strange and his mystics provided portals for those who wanted to stay here. They kindly extended that offer to Happy and me, since you were here."

Peter felt that he was missing something yet again. May and Happy's names had been said together multiple times now. Morgan had said that Uncle Happy and Aunt May had watched her while her parents fought against Thanos and his army of aliens. But why did she say Aunt May with the name Uncle Happy? And why had Mr. Doctor Strange offered for Happy to come to Wakanda because of Peter? Shouldn't it have been because his boss was injured? May had wanted to talk to Peter in private, without the Starks being present. She said that there was something she wanted to

talk about; something to do with the changes that had happened in the past five years. What did May want to explain, in private, that had something to do with the changes that Peter had missed? And that was just the tip of the iceberg of weirdness. Happy was eating with them. Why would he do that, when he hadn't ever hung out with Peter and May before? Suddenly, things began to click. The final puzzle piece clicked when he saw the wedding ring on May's hand and on Happy's hand.

May and Happy had gotten married. While Peter was dead.

That was the final straw for him. Things had changed so much and Peter just couldn't anymore. He died. He came back five years later. He had heard Mr. Stark's heart stop and saw the arc reactor go out. He had found out that Mr. Stark and Miss. Potts had gotten married. He met Mr. Stark's four-year-old daughter, Morgan. He had found out that May had married Happy. All in one day. What else was he about to be hit with?

"I-I gotta go," Peter mumbled, stumbling away from May and Happy.

"Peter?" May asked, reaching out to grab Peter's arm. "What's wrong?"

Peter pushed her hand away from him. "I-I'm sorry. I can't do this."

With that, Peter ran away from the room, leaving May and Happy calling after him.

...

A person stood in front of a TV. The TV was turned on to a news program that was talking about the return of the people who had died five years previously due to the Snap. A news anchor was interviewing a woman who, it appeared, had witnessed their loved one coming back.

*"It was incredible!" the interviewee was saying. "I watched, astonished, as she came back to me, one piece of dust at a time!" The woman had tears in her eyes as she recounted the events. "And when Martha was fully back, I hugged her so hard! All I could think was 'Thank God, thank God.'"*

*"Were you confused?" the anchor asked.*

*"Of course! Why would I not be? So I got on Instagram and started asking around, just to find out how Martha came back to me. Martha couldn't tell me, you see, because she didn't have a clue either! She told me that no time had passed for her. Anyways, Instagram said that the Avengers were the ones who revived everyone. So, for the rest of my life, I will keep thanking the Avengers for bringing back Martha and I owe them big time. "*

The news anchor turned to face the camera. She was also crying, but what it was from was unclear. *"Well, you heard it here, folks. Thanks to the Avengers, everyone who had died on April 23, 2018 has been revived. Back to you, Mark. "*

The news program switched from showing the news anchor and the woman to showing a news anchor sitting behind a desk. The man was looking at the camera, appearing relieved and quite happy. *"Thank you, Violet. Now, we have received word on the injuries Iron Man, AKA Tony Stark, sustained from the Compound Battle, which is the name of the fight that took place earlier today. CEO of Stark Industries and wife of Stark, Virginia 'Pepper' Stark, has stated that Stark is expected to make a full recovery. Unfortunately, he has lost his right arm due to the radiation caused by the Snap. I think it is easy to say that everyone, not just here in New York City but around the world, is thankful for the sacrifices the Avengers went through in bringing back the Vanished, but especially thankful for the sacrifices made by Natasha Romanov and Stark. After the break --"*

The TV abruptly turned off. The person standing behind the TV was glaring at the TV, seemingly mad at something the news was saying. That thing was revealed in their next words. “Yes, let’s *all* thank the Avengers, especially Iron Man. After all, it wasn’t like it was their fault in the first place why everyone died.” The person sneered. “Nope, not at all. But they’ll know soon. They’ll know that their faith has been misplaced for years. Starting with Spider-Man.” The person turned around to face a cork board that displayed a picture of Spider-Man. Next to it, a picture of Peter Parker was pinned next to it. “And I know exactly who he is. And I know what I need to use to show the people that their faith was misplaced.” The person held up a jar with something black in it. As they held it, the black goo began to move.

The person finished his speech with one last triumphant word. “*Venom.* ”

## Chapter End Notes

Introduction to the villain! Thank you for reading and stay tuned for next week's chapter!

## Chapter Two

### Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday everyone! I hope y'all had a good week and I hope you enjoy this week's chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### Part One

#### *A lonely speaker in a conversation*

*Saturday, August 26, 2023*

After leaving May and Happy, Peter stood in the middle of the hallway, unsure of where to go. He was already feeling guilty for leaving them, but not guilty enough to go back in. He also didn't want to go back into Mr. Stark's room, with the so-called "sister" that he knew nothing about. However, he had no idea where his own room was. So, he started walking aimlessly around, hoping to find a nurse or doctor who could lead him to his room.

After a couple of minutes of walking around, Peter heard a voice call him from behind him, a voice that sounded vaguely familiar.

"Son?" the voice called. Peter, like any other person in the world, easily recognized Captain America when he spun around. However, he had never personally met the captain. Sure, he had stolen his shield back at the airport in Germany, but that was about it. But that was when he was Spider-Man, not Peter Parker. So it was no surprise to Peter when he fell back into the stuttering mess that he was whenever he met his childhood idols.

"C-Captain A-America," Peter said, stumbling over his words.

"Please, just call me Steve," Captain America said. "You're Peter, right?"

*Oh, God,* Peter thought. One of the first Avengers, no, *the* first Avenger knew his name. How? "Y-yes, sir."

"It's good to finally meet you, son. Tony talked about you all the time."

Peter bit his lip. The exchange was reminding him about the conversation he had had with Morgan just a little bit ago. Just how much did Mr. Stark talk about him in the past five years? And how much was "all the time"? Enough for Captain America to know that he was Spider-Man? Enough for him to know that he had fought a fourteen-year-old in Germany? And why would Mr. Stark be talking with Captain America? Last Peter checked, Mr. Stark and the captain weren't really on speaking terms. Peter wasn't quite sure what had happened, but he could guess that it had something to do with whatever happened in Siberia. Did their relationship change while Peter was dead? Suddenly, Peter realized that Captain America was looking expectantly at him, waiting for a response. "Really?" Peter hurriedly said.

Captain America nodded. "Your death really hit him hard. I've never seen him like that. He was devastated."

Peter didn't really know how to reply to that one. How should he talk about the impact his death had had on someone? And he didn't want to know about Mr. Stark's reaction. It caused his stomach to turn over in guilt. And he hated how much guilt he felt, from dying five years ago (or earlier that day if Peter was thinking about it from his perspective) to hearing Mr. Stark's heart stop to leaving his aunt and Happy in the cafeteria. So, instead of replying, he decided to remove himself from the conversation.

"Captain America," Peter said quickly. "I appreciate meeting you, but I have to go."

Captain America looked at him oddly, easily seeing through Peter's lie. But he didn't call Peter out for it, making Peter feel gratitude towards the captain. "Alright," he said. "I understand."

"Thanks, Captain America."

"Steve, son."

Peter grinned apologetically. "Sorry, Cap-Mr. Rogers."

Even though Peter still didn't call him "Steve," Mr. Rogers seemed okay with the new form of address. "No worries, son. See you around." Giving him a two-fingered salute, Mr. Rogers walked past Peter and continued down the hallway.

Sighing with relief, Peter turned around, not wanting to follow Mr. Rogers. Only then did he realize that the captain might know where Peter's room was.

"Hey, Mr. Rogers?" he called.

Mr. Rogers turned back around to face Peter. "Yes?"

Peter winced embarrassedly. He knew his question was one that he should know the answer to and, having to ask it to Captain America--one of his childhood idols--made him feel embarrassed. "Do you know where my room is?"

Peter felt his appreciation for the captain increase when Mr. Rogers acted like Peter's question was a normal question. "I don't, I'm afraid," Mr. Rogers said, sounding truly sincere. "One of the medical personnel might know, though."

"Thanks, Mr. Rogers. I'll try to find someone."

"There's a nursing station down this hallway on the right. I can show you if you want."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Rogers, but you don't have to go through all that trouble. I can walk by myself."

"It's not a problem, son. I'm walking that way myself."

"Oh, um..." Peter said, his voice trailing off. "If you're sure that it's okay--"

"I am."

"Then I'll walk with you."

Peter fell into step beside Mr. Rogers, easily keeping up with him as they walked down to the nursing station. They walked in awkward silence for a couple of moments, Peter unsure how to talk to one of Earth's mightiest defenders.



Mr. Rogers, apparently, didn't share in his awkwardness, because he easily started up a conversation. "How are you feeling?"

Peter's initial response was to say "fine," but he stopped when he realized that that wasn't really true. He tried to find a word that accurately explained his feelings right at that moment, and discovered that there wasn't any. "I'm not sure exactly," Peter said.

Mr. Rogers nodded. "I can understand that. It's weird being in a world where everything's the same, yet not at the same time."

Peter agreed full-heartedly with the captain's explanation. He was reminded that what he was feeling was similar to what Mr. Rogers had experienced when he came out of the ice. "Got any tips on how to navigate the confusion?"

Mr. Rogers laughed. "I'm not so sure if my advice would be of any help. After all, you only lost five years; I lost sixty-six."

Peter shrugged. "You're the only person I know that understands this."

"Don't be so sure about that. Remember, you died with half of the world. There's almost four billion people who understand what you are experiencing." Mr. Rogers ran a hand through his hair. "I guess my advice would be to talk with them. Talk with those people about what you're experiencing. You're grieving the things that you missed in the last five years, and the best way to deal with that grief is to talk through it. What better way to do that than by talking with people who are grieving the same things you are and experiencing exactly what you are right now?"

Peter understood what the captain was saying. He could also see the sense in his words. "Thanks, Mr. Rogers. That was good advice."

"Glad I can help."

At that moment, the two of them arrived at the station. "Thank you, Mr. Rogers. It was good to talk with you." And Peter could honestly say that it *was* good. He was happy that he had run into the captain and hoped that he and Mr. Rogers could talk more in the future.

Mr. Rogers nodded. "See you around, son."

"See you around." With that, Mr. Rogers continued walking down the hallway, clearly intent on whatever he was doing before he had talked with Peter. Peter walked up to the nurse on duty.

The nurse looked up from his computer. "Can I help you?"

"Yes," Peter said. "I'm trying to find my room."

The nurse blinked in surprise at the weirdness of Peter's question but didn't comment on it. The nurse simply looked back at his computer, quickly typing something in. "Name?"

"Peter Parker."

Peter heard the clacking of his keyboard and his mouse as the nurse navigated somewhere in order to find Peter's information. After a minute, the nurse looked back up at him. "You're in room 30."

"Thank you," Peter said. "And, um, where exactly is that?"

Again, the nurse didn't comment on the question, simply taking out a map of the facility and

highlighting the path towards the room. After he was done explaining, Peter took the map, mumbling his thanks.

Following the map, Peter found room 30 easily. Peter stopped in the doorway suddenly when he noticed that Mrs. Stark was sitting on the bed. He was a little surprised to see her there, but also not that surprised. Peter had a strong feeling that it was thanks to May that she was waiting for him.

“Peter,” she said simply, like it was completely normal for her to be lying in ambush for him.

“Mrs. Stark.”

“Pepper, honey.” She waited for Peter to make the correction. When he didn’t, she continued talking. “May told me that you had disappeared. She was worried that you had left or that...” Her voice trailed off, but Peter could fill in her unspoken words. *Or that you had died again.*

Peter felt his stomach swoop in guilt. Why didn’t he think that she would’ve gone to the worst-case scenario? How unfair was that of him? “Can you tell her that I’m sorry?”

She shook her head. “I think you should tell her yourself.”

Peter fiddled with his hands. “Maybe I should, but not now.”

“And why not now?” Peter stayed silent, not saying a word. Everything felt like too much and it was beginning to overwhelm him. He felt like a lifeboat adrift in the middle of a storm--waves, wind, and rain hitting him mercilessly, the storm not caring if he survived. All Peter wanted to do was to decompress from everything that he had learned today. Apologizing to May at that very moment would be counterproductive to that desire. However, Peter wasn’t quite sure how to explain that to Mrs. Stark. So, he stayed quiet. After a minute, she said, “Peter, I understand that--”

“I think I’m just going to go to bed.”

“Peter, we’re here to help. Just let--”

“Mrs. Stark, please. I just don’t want to talk right now. Maybe later. Just, please, not now.”

Mrs. Stark pursed her lips, but conceded. “Alright. I’ll let you sleep.” She walked past Peter, but stopped beside him. Putting a hand on his shoulder, she said, “Peter, we care about you. That’s the only reason why we are trying to talk to you and understand what you’re feeling. If you need anything, and I mean *anything*, at all, don’t be scared to reach out. Your aunt and Happy are here for you, not to mention Tony and I. I know it’s a lot to take in and we’re here to help you adjust.”

Peter nodded, unable to talk past the lump that had formed in his throat. Mrs. Stark left, shutting the door behind her. The curtains were closed in the room and the lights were off, meaning that the door had been the only source of light. With its closing, Peter was left in the darkness and the storm inside of his mind, a storm filled with unexplainable thoughts and emotions, swirling to fast for him to properly understand or comprehend them.

...

Peter barely slept that night. He was a bit surprised at that, since he felt absolutely exhausted, yet every time he closed his eyes, all he could see was Mr. Stark’s arc reactor going out and all he could feel was the pain from when he died. After an hour or two of lying in bed without sleeping, Peter finally got up and watched TV. Luckily, he found a *Star Wars* marathon and zoned out watching it. He closed his eyes, trying to calm the emotions he was feeling. He must’ve fallen asleep, since when he opened up his eyes next, the sun was up and the clock was reading 8:00 AM.

Peter stood up, deciding that it would be best to try to find Happy and May. He was feeling better than yesterday and felt much more emotionally prepared to talk to them. He was still hurt that it seemed that everyone had forgotten about him and had moved on with their lives, but Peter thought that was selfish of him. He had died. Didn't he want his family to continue their lives after his death? So why was this any different? Yet it was. It was completely different for a reason Peter couldn't articulate.

Stepping outside of his room, Peter traced his steps from yesterday and found himself at the cafeteria. People were bustling around, but Peter sat down at a table, feeling slightly removed from the activity. He turned his head when he felt someone sitting beside him.

"Hey, kid," Happy said, handing him a plate piled high with pancakes. "You doing alright?"

Peter nodded. "Yeah, I'm fine. I'm sorry about yesterday and disappearing."

Happy shook his head. "No, don't apologize. Your world turned upside down yesterday. It's surprising you handled it as well as you did."

Peter nodded again, unsure of what to say to Happy's words. After a little bit, Peter decided that he wanted to talk about what had caused him to leave yesterday. "So, you and May, huh?"

"Yeah," Happy sighed. "Look, I understand if you feel like I'm replacing your uncle, but I'm not. That was never my intention."

"Happy," Peter said, interrupting Happy's rambling. "I don't think that. All that matters is that she's happy. And is she?"

"I think so. You have to ask her yourself."

"Ask who?" Peter turned around to see May approaching them. "Good morning, Peter."

"Hi, Aunt May. I'm sorry about yesterday."

"Nu-uh. We're not doing that. You have nothing to be sorry about." Peter smiled sheepishly as May continued talking. "What were you two talking about?"

Peter looked at Happy, but the man looked away. It appeared that Peter was on his own. "Well, we were, um..." He cleared his throat and calmed himself before asking his question. "Are you happy with Happy, May?"

The question threw his aunt off guard, causing her to blink rapidly. She seemed perplexed at his question, like the answer should be obvious. "Of course, honey. Why wouldn't I be?"

Peter glanced at Happy before turning back to face May. "Then I'm happy." And it was true. Peter still felt like he was not welcome in the family that his aunt and Happy had built, but if May was happy, then so was he. Maybe at the moment he felt sad that he had missed five years of life, but that would all pass in time.

May smiled. "That's great, honey." She pushed his plate closer to him. "You should eat before they get too cold. Cold pancakes are gross."

Peter started eating the pancakes, saying, "Agreed."

...

The next few days passed relatively quickly for Peter. They were a mix of catching up with everything he had missed in the past five years and also catching up with everyone. Peter felt welcome with his family and began to fit back into the relationships. Granted, there were still moments where he felt left out, especially when it came to Morgan.

Morgan was a bundle of energy, moving quickly from one pastime to the next. Peter found himself struggling to keep up with her activities, unsure what she would like or dislike that particular day (or that particular second). She would also mention things that made Peter realize just how much he had missed during the Blip (the name people were calling the five years half the world had missed). Such an instance occurred on the second day of being in Wakanda, just a few short hours after his reconciliation with May and Happy.

After breakfast, Peter went to Mr. Stark's room. Seeing that the man was gone, Peter almost freaked out, thinking that Mr. Stark had died again. Fortunately, Mrs. Stark appeared out of nowhere, calming him down instantly.

"Are you looking for Tony?" she asked. When Peter nodded, she said, "Follow me."

The two of them had headed downstairs, where Mrs. Stark and Morgan were staying. Mr. Stark was sitting on a chair next to Morgan. The two of them appeared to be having a pretend tea party, as Morgan was "pouring" her father a cup of tea. Mr. Stark beamed up at Peter when he entered the room.

"Hey, kiddo!" his mentor called to him, waving Peter over. "I got worried when your aunt came in yesterday, saying that you had disappeared. What happened?"

Peter shrugged, not wanting to explain nor how to begin his explanation. Before he could say anything to sidestep Mr. Stark's question, Morgan saved him.

"Peter!" she yelled, not seeming to understand that Peter was right in front of her and completely capable of hearing her without her having to yell (not to mention, he had enhanced hearing-- meaning that he would be able to hear her perfectly well, even if she had whispered). "Come have tea with us!"

"Sure," Peter said, sitting down on the little chair beside Morgan. Instantly, Peter knew that he had made a grave mistake. Morgan glared at him as if he had just killed her best friend. Even at four-years-old, her death glare was terrifying to Peter, a real superhero who fought bad guys for a living. Peter turned to Mr. Stark, wondering what he had done wrong.

Mr. Stark simply grinned, seemingly happy that Peter was the reason for Morgan's anger. Thankfully, Mrs. Stark came to Peter's rescue.

She bent down to whisper in his ear. "That's Spider-Boy's seat."

Peter's brow wrinkled in confusion. "Who?"

Morgan glared harder, if that was possible. "Spider-Boy," the girl said, like it was obvious.

Seeing Peter's continued confusion, Mr. Stark's grin faded. "Spider-Boy is her imaginary friend that she based off of the Spider-Man stories I told her," his mentor explained.

Right. The Spider-Man stories that Mr. Stark had told his daughter when Spider-Man was dead. Stories that Mr. Stark had told without Peter, since Peter was dead. Peter felt that everything was too much yet again. Peter had died and Morgan had grown up hearing stories about all the good he had done. She had heard so much of those good, heroic things that she had created an imaginary

friend inspired by her father's stories. Peter wasn't that great to base an imaginary friend after him. Peter didn't deserve that, not when he had caused Mr. Stark's almost death and also his own death five years ago. Peter felt the guilt creep up on him, and Morgan's continued glare just made him feel unwanted. Not only that, but what sort of brother was Peter that he didn't even know about his little sister's imaginary friend? No, Peter was unable to meet the expectations Morgan had of him as Spider-Man and the expectations Mr. Stark had of him as the older brother of Morgan.

Peter stood up quickly. "Sorry," he said, before bolting out of the room. He heard Mr. Stark calling after him, but he ignored the calls, fleeing from the guilt that was threatening to overwhelm him. For hours afterwards, Peter had wandered the halls of the Wakandan hospital, eventually ending up in a courtyard filled with flowers and birds chirping. The scene was serene, a stark contrast to the feelings swimming inside of Peter. He stayed out there for the rest of the day, letting the peacefulness of the courtyard wash over him.

Other situations similar to that one occurred haphazardly in the six days he, May, and Happy stayed at Wakanda. Peter knew that no one intended to make him feel unnecessary, but it happened constantly. May had built a family with Happy, a family that Peter was never a part of. Mr. Stark had built a family with Mrs. Stark and Morgan, another family that Peter just couldn't seem to find his place in. The two families had also created a bridge between them, a bridge that was formed because of Peter's death. And if it was Peter's death that had formed that bridge, then Peter's state of life was causing fractures all along that bridge.

As it was, Peter was relieved when it came time to say good-bye to the Starks and return home to Queens. That same day, Mr. Stark returned home with his wife and daughter. However, that home was not the penthouse Peter had known. No, it was a cabin beside a lake in upstate New York, a house that Peter had never stepped foot in. Mr. Stark's mention of his new house was, yet again, another reminder that Peter didn't belong in this new world. So, yes, Peter was relieved to be going back to Queens, with the same apartment, the same school, the same surroundings. Five years might've impacted Peter's relationship with his aunt and Mr. Stark, but five years wouldn't shake the feeling of home that the apartment he shared with May always brought him, right?

## Chapter End Notes

Oh, Peter, you have no idea. Anyways, thanks for reading and see you next week for chapter three!

## Chapter Three

### Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday morning! Has everyone seen the trailer for No Way Home? It looks incredible and I am so looking forward to the movie!! Anyways, enjoy today's chapter! Longest one so far!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### Part One

#### *A lonely speaker in a conversation*

*Friday, September 1, 2023*

Peter was wrong. He knew he was wrong when their car missed the turn to go to the apartment building.

“Happy?” he asked, since Happy was the one driving the car. “Where are we going?”

“Home,” he said, as if it was obvious.

May seemed to understand Peter’s confusion. “I moved in with Happy after we got married. So home is now Happy’s apartment.”

“What happened to our apartment?”

May bit her lip, clearly worried about where their conversation was going. “We sold it. It didn’t make sense to keep it when Happy and I already had a place.”

Yet again, for what felt like the millionth time, Peter felt a storm of emotions wash over him. That apartment was where he had grown up. That apartment was where he had lived after his parents had passed away. That apartment was where he had met Mr. Stark for the first time. That apartment was where he had come up with the idea of Spider-Man. Uncle Ben had lived there with them before he had passed away. As silly as it was, that apartment was a connection with his late uncle. To not have it anymore hurt. And he felt that he should’ve known that his home would’ve moved. Happy and May had gotten married. People move when they marry someone. Besides, everything else from his old life had changed. How could he have thought that his apartment would be exempt from that change?

“--ter?” Peter looked up to see May had turned around in her seat to look back at him. Her expression was filled with concern. Dimly, Peter realized that she had been calling his name several times but, lost in his thoughts, Peter hadn’t noticed. “Are you okay?” his aunt asked.

Peter took a deep breath, remembering what he had decided after May had told him that Happy made her happy. If May was happy living with Happy in her new apartment, then Peter was happy. “Yeah. Sorry.”

May simply pursed her lips, obviously not believing him. Yet she didn’t say a word; she just turned back to face the front. Peter looked out the window, watching the people and cars out and about. It

didn't take long for him to notice that something was off about his city. Everyone seemed haunted by something, something that Peter could easily place. There seemed to be more homeless people as well. Everything was a mess as well, trashcans and dumpsters lining the streets, their contents spilling out onto the streets. Many of the buildings were also abandoned, locks placed on their doors and wood covering the windows. Granted, New York typically was a mess (as any major city was), but this was extreme. Thanos' snap must've done more damage than Peter had initially thought.

After several more minutes of driving, they came to a stop outside of an apartment building; an apartment building that seemed relatively more fancy than Peter's old apartment. Happy parked the car and Peter stepped out, staring up at the building. May came up to stand beside him. "Peter, honey, are you really okay?"

Peter forced a smile, looking at May as he spoke. "Yeah, I'm fine. It's just...weird, that's all."

"Weird how?"

Peter gestured widely. "Everything's the same, yet different. I get a sense of *deja vu* just by riding in the car. I know the streets, I know the buildings--yet the people, cars, and the surroundings are different. Shops and restaurants that I know and love are gone. Not to mention, everyone looks traumatized and everything's a mess."

May nodded. "Everyone lost someone. Because of that, it was hard to move on. So people stopped caring and that's when everything became a mess. With half the population gone, businesses began to fail. Soon, they shut down all together. I suppose that--with everyone coming back so suddenly--everything went crazy and the government's still trying to figure things out."

May's last sentence struck a chord with Peter. He hadn't even begun to wonder about the impact that half the world suddenly returning would have on the government. Legally, things must be insane. People had probably moved into the homes that were left abandoned after the Blip. Now, with those people back, who was the true owner of those houses? Not to mention, people had missed birthdays. Their birth certificate stated what age they should be, but--thanks to the Blip--that information was false now. Peter realized that he had no idea what that meant for him. "May, how old am I? Like, legally."

May frowned. "How old do you think you are?"

"I-I don't know. I was sixteen the day I died," Peter said. "But now, I can't say. Am I twenty-two, like I would be if I had been alive for the past five years, or am I sixteen?"

May frowned. "It's hard to say. I would just go with whatever age you personally think you are. You don't remember any time passing, right?"

"Right."

"Then I would say you're sixteen. If you don't remember the time passing, then why would you count that?"

And when May phrased it that way, Peter agreed with her. Why count the six birthdays that he missed when he wasn't even aware that they had happened? "Thanks, May. That was insightful."

"No problem, honey. Now, how about we go inside and get some lunch?"

Once up in Happy's apartment (or, more accurately, *Peter's* new apartment), Peter took a look around. Everything was orderly and clean. It was a far cry from his old apartment, where

sweatshirts, shoes, and random things littered every free place. Not that Peter and May were slob (well, Peter was, but wasn't every sixteen-year-old boy?), but that was how their home was. As May described it, their apartment was lived in. Happy's, it seemed, wasn't like that. Nothing was out of place and everything looked brand new. It was the type of house that made Peter instantly want to take his shoes off before walking in. However, Peter could still see May's taste around the apartment. He could see it in the pictures of May, Ben, and his parents that were hanging on the walls. Peter also saw himself in the pictures. While Peter was dead, it seemed like he wasn't forgotten by May and Happy. And Peter could see that unforgetfulness in the Starks' family as well, seeing as Morgan had grown up with bedtime stories about Spider-Man.

After spying around the living room, kitchen, and dining room, he made his way down the hall. Inside one room, he saw a bathroom. Inside another, though, he found piles of boxes. He wasn't planning on going into that room, but he couldn't help himself when he noticed that one of the boxes had the words "Peter's clothes." Stepping fully inside, he noticed that all of the boxes were filled with something of his, whether it was his school things, lego creations, or clothes. Opening up the closet, he saw a few more boxes. Only, these boxes were labeled either "Peter's Birthday Gifts" or "Peter's Christmas Gifts." Peeking inside one of them, he saw wrapped gifts sitting inside of it, begging to be opened.

Peter stumbled back, disturbed by the thought that May had collected gifts for him while he was dead. He ended up on the floor, staring at the boxes of unopened gifts. Why? Why would she have done that if he was dead? He understood keeping his other things (after all, they still had Ben's things because, even after his death, they were unable to get rid of anything), but the act of picking out gifts while Peter was dead was a disturbing practice.

But he thought about it a little harder. He had no body that they had to bury. His death might not have happened since there wasn't any proof that it had, in fact, happened. Disappearing into thin air might have made people feel like the deaths weren't permanent and that the Avengers could think of some way to bring the dead people back. After all, wasn't that denial what caused the Avengers to even contemplate bringing Peter and half of the world back from the dead? If he wasn't truly dead, then that justified May buying gifts for Peter so that he could open them when he returned.

Just then, May walked in. She took a look around the storage room, her face falling more and more. When her eyes finally fell on Peter, her face brightened considerably. The frown quickly returned when she saw the boxes in the closet. "Hey, honey," she said, crouching so that she was next to him on the ground. "What are you doing?"

"Looking around," he said, his voice thick with emotion. "Did you really buy gifts for me while I was gone?"

"Of course I did," she said. "Why wouldn't I?"

"I was dead."

May looked at the boxes for a couple of seconds before replying to Peter's explanation. Seeing the boxes seemed to make May sad. Peter realized that she was probably being reminded of the past five years, time where she had thought that she was the only member of her family alive. "If you were really dead," she said. "Would you be sitting here next to me right now?"

"No, but--"

"There is no 'but.' You weren't dead, you only... Vanished." She smiled at him, prompting Peter to chuckle at her words.



In the last five years, people had begun to call the people who died “the Vanished,” and the term had stuck even after the Vanished returned. For May to use it now was a pretty lame attempt at humor. “That wasn’t funny.”

“Apparently it was, if you laughed at it.”

Peter snorted. “Congrats. You made the guy who thinks wearing punny science shirts is cool laugh. After all, we both know that’s a pretty hard accomplishment.”

May laughed hard at that. So hard, in fact, that she had to wipe her eyes afterwards. Peter smiled at the ease in which they shifted back to their teasing relationship. Before everything had changed, this was always how their relationship was. Each of them joking and teasing the other person. Their jokes were always terrible, yet they never failed to make the other person laugh. May seemed to share Peter’s view on that, since after she finished laughing, she said, “Peter, I have missed you so very much these past few years.”

Peter simply grinned. “No you didn’t,” he said jokingly. “You only missed my sense of humor.”

“Don’t get cocky, mister,” May warned, pointing her finger at him. “Your jokes aren’t that funny.” Peter raised his eyebrow. Didn’t he just make her laugh so hard that she had started crying? Choosing not to answer his unspoken question, she stood up. “What do you want for lunch?”

Peter frowned thoughtfully. “Delmar’s?”

May shook her head. “Delmar’s was one of the first restaurants to close down during the Blip.”

Peter gaped at her. “The best sandwich place in all of Queens *shut down*?”

May shrugged. “Apparently the people that liked his sandwiches were the Vanished. Any other places in mind?”

Peter blinked, still trying to wrap his head around the fact that Delmar’s had closed. He hoped that Mr. Delmar and his cat, Murph, were okay. “I guess Thai.”

“Sounds good. I’ll go get it now.” May turned around and walked out of the room. Before she left completely, Peter called after her.

“Hey, May?” May turned around, quirked an eyebrow at him. “I larb you.”

May smiled warmly. “I larb you, too, Peter.”

...

The next day, May encouraged Peter to text Ned. He asked May if Ned had Vanished as well. With tears in her eyes, she nodded before leaving to get ready for the day. A part of Peter was happy that Ned had Vanished, relieved that his best friend was experiencing the same thing as Peter was. Of course, that happiness had led to Peter feeling guilty that he was happy that Ned had Vanished, since that meant that Ned’s family had grieved him for the past five years. Guilt seemed to be the only emotion Peter knew. Pushing away his emotions, Peter sent a quick text to Ned. He then put it on his desk and turned around to make his bed. He smiled when his phone buzzed back just a few seconds later. It was quickly followed by another buzz. Ned was always a quick texter and he typically sent several messages out at the same time; it seemed some things never changed, even if the world had seemed to flip upside down overnight. Peter walked back to his desk, looking at the two messages Ned had sent him.

**Today 11:47 AM**

**Parkour:** Hey, man

**Guy in the Chair:** peter!!

**Guy in the Chair:** oh my god! your alright!

Peter smiled at the incorrect grammar Ned used and decided not to comment on it. Instead, he replied back quickly.

**Today 11:47 AM**

**Parkour:** Yup! :)

**Parkour:** Hbu

Peter put the phone down, ignoring it after it buzzed once. By the fourth buzz, though, it was back in his hand.

**Today 11:48 AM**

**Guy in the Chair:** i'm back as well!

**Guy in the Chair:** but it's weird y'know?

**Guy in the Chair:** like how crazy is it that i died?

**Guy in the Chair:** and i didn't even realized it til i came back and my mom was crying like crazy

Peter frowned at Ned's last message. He didn't realize that he had died until he came back? Peter flashed back to when he was turning into dust. He had known that he was dying, right?

*He looked away from Mr. Stark, preparing himself for the end. Preparing himself for when he saw his mother and father and Uncle Ben again. After wishing that Mr. Stark and May would move on after he left, Peter closed eyes, embracing the darkness that came with it.*

Yep, Peter was fully aware that he was dying and that was a horrible idea to flashback to his last moments before he "died." Yep, horrible idea, Peter realized, as his breath sped up and his heart started to beat like crazy. He focused on controlling his breathing, something that Mr. Stark had taught. Once his breathing calmed down a bit, Peter looked down to read Ned's newest messages.

**Today 11:51 AM**

**Guy in the Chair:** have you talked to mj?

**Guy in the Chair :** she vanished as well

**Guy in the Chair:** oh!

**Guy in the Chair:** me and her are meeting at that sandwich place

**Guy in the Chair:** y'know...

**Guy in the Chair:** the place where you stopped that kidnapping and got stabbed?

**Guy in the Chair:** while you were spider-man?

**Guy in the Chair:** here ill just send you the address

**Guy in the Chair:** were meeting @ 12

Peter pushed away the relief he felt when Ned told him that MJ had been one of the Vanished. Just as suddenly as he pushed away those emotions, he had to push away the feeling of guilt when he realized that he had just felt relief at the fact that MJ had died.

Peter faintly remembered the place that Ned was talking about. If he remembered correctly, that was the first time he was ever stabbed (not that it should be an important milestone or anything). Mr. Stark just about had a heart attack when Peter showed up in the Tower, covered in blood. Ned sent him the location, snapping out him out of his memories, and Peter realized that he had to leave at that moment if he wanted to be somewhat on time. It was a ten-minute walk. Five if he ran.

“Hey, May!” Peter called, slipping on his shoes. He walked into the living room when May didn’t respond. “May?”

“Hey, kid,” a voice said. Spinning around, Peter saw Happy coming out of the kitchen. Peter could see that he was cooking something. Or maybe he was baking something, as evidenced by the pan of cookies sitting on the cooling rack. “She just left for work. Do you need something?”

Right. Happy was his step-uncle (was that an actual thing?) now. “She went to work? I thought it was Saturday?”

“It is. She had to go in ‘cause of the Blip. It’s a madhouse at the shelter right now.”

Wait, where? May worked at the hospital. Well, five years ago she did. Maybe she worked at a new place now? “Shelter?” Peter asked.

“Yeah,” Happy said. “She runs FEAST.”

Okay, that was a new place that Peter had never heard of before, but he pushed that aside, instead focusing on the fact that he was supposed to meet his friends in less than ten minutes. “I’m going over to eat with MJ and Ned. I’ll be back in an hour or two.”

“Where are you eating?”

“Some sandwich place. It’s, like, ten minutes away.”

Happy looked at Peter, clearly debating whether it was safe or not. Peter tried not to fidget, worried that if he appeared anxious, Happy would say no. “Alright,” the man finally said. “But text when you get there, okay? And when you leave. And if you decide to stop somewhere else. Or if--”

“Got it, Happy,” Peter said, cutting off Happy’s long list of rules. “See you later!” Peter left the apartment quickly. He understood that Happy was just worried about his safety, but his behavior bordered on helicopter-ish. Peter knew that that was just how the man was (he was Mr. Stark’s forehead of security for a reason) and that he would get used to it eventually. Eventually wasn’t at that moment, though. After getting outside, Peter sent a quick text to Ned, frowning when he saw the time.

**Today 11:58 AM**

**Parkour:** Omw

Peter was going to have to run if he wanted to make it on time. He started to jog down the street, worried about running at his top speed. He knew that doing so would ensure that he made it to the meet-up on time, but it would also reveal that he was enhanced. Or, even worse, reveal his superhero identity. And Peter absolutely did not want to do that. Arriving, he walked through the door, hearing the bell tinkling above the door. Peter checked the time on his phone, grinning when he saw that he was late by only a couple of minutes.

“Peter!” a voice called.

Looking up, Peter saw Ned, his best friend. He was sitting in a booth by a window. Across from him was MJ. Her nose was in a book, as usual, but she looked up when Ned had called to Peter. Their eyes met briefly, and Peter felt his heart skip a beat. She smirked and looked back down at her book. Peter shook his head, trying to clear the strange feeling he had got when he made eye contact with MJ. Eerily, the feeling was the same one he used to get when he saw Liz.

“Hey, guys!” Peter said, walking over to their booth. Ned got out and gave Peter a hug.

“It’s great to see you!” Ned said.

Peter smiled, hugging Ned back. “It’s good to see you, too, man.” He and Ned sat down next to each other.

“Hey, loser,” MJ said to him, still reading her book.

Peter nodded to her and began to listen to Ned’s rambling.

“--weird coming back, right? Like, one second I was having a conversation with my little sister and then she just disappeared the next second! I was so confused and then my mom came into the room--I was at my house when it happened, by the way--and she was crying and I just got even more confused. Then, she called my dad and he came home from work and he started crying, which is weird, ‘cause he’s not very emotional, but you know that--you met him before. Anyways, what about you? How was it for you?” He directed his question to Peter, since MJ was still stuck inside of her book.

Peter pushed away the memory of pain and turning into dust. “Same thing happened to me. I was talking to someone and then, when I came back, he was gone.”

MJ finally put down her book, leaning closer towards Peter. “Who were you talking to?”

“What?” Peter asked, weirded out by her reaction.

“You said you were talking to someone when you Vanished. Who was it?”

“Oh, um...”

“And where did you go on the bus? I saw you on it, but when we got to MOMA, you were gone.”

“Um...” Peter’s mind blanked, unable to come up with a response. “W-well, I had to go.”

“Go where?”

Peter tried to come up with some reason, and his mind landed on the age-old lie that he always used. “The Stark Internship?” he answered, hoping that MJ didn’t notice how he phrased it as a question.

MJ’s brow wrinkled in confusion. “The Stark Internship?”

Ned nodded, helping Peter with his lie. “Yep. That’s what he told me before he left.”

“You had to skip school because of your internship?” MJ asked.

Peter immediately began to see the holes in his cover story. He hoped that he could patch them up before the whole story was ripped to shreds by MJ’s questions. “Yeah, Mr. Stark really needed my help that day.” Seeing MJ’s confusion grow, he added, “That’s who I was talking to when I Vanished.”

“Hmp,” MJ said. She leaned back in her seat, seemingly satisfied with Peter’s story. Peter gave a sigh of relief. However, the tension came back with her next words, words that destroyed her outward appearance. “He needed your help with fighting those aliens?”

“What? No, no, no,” Peter said quickly. “No. He just asked me to fix a couple of things on a new StarkPhone prototype.”

“And he needed you to do that during school hours?”

“Yep. He’s a very impatient man.”

MJ stared at Peter for a couple of seconds. “You’re a terrible liar, Parker.”

“What?” Peter exclaimed. “What are you talking about? I’m a very good liar. Not that you would know, since I’m telling the truth right now.”

MJ scoffed. “Right. Definitely not lying about the fact that you’re Spider-Man.”

Ned, at this point, was watching Peter and MJ’s exchange like a tennis match. At MJ’s last words, his face quickly turned to shock. “N-no, he’s not Spider-Man!”

“Yeah, what Ned said!” Peter said.

MJ stared at Peter. Peter began to grow uncomfortable with her continued staring. “Don’t lie. It’s obvious.” She started to list things, using her fingers to count off each one. “First, you disappeared at Liz’s party and then Spider-Man appeared a few blocks away. Second, you disappeared at DC and Spider-Man appeared at the Washington Monument, which is, in case you don’t know, 243 miles away from Queens, Spider-Man’s home.”

“Damn,” Ned muttered under her breath. “She’s really thought about this.”

“Shut up, Ned,” Peter muttered back.

“Sorry,” his friend whispered back.

“Third, you ditched detention and Spider-Man popped up at the Staten Island Ferry. Fourth, Spider-Man vanished the same time that you said that you said you lost your internship with Stark. Fifth, you ditched Liz--a jerk thing to do, by the way, ditching your Homecoming date *at* Homecoming--and Spider-Man showed up at the school. Finally, you disappeared on the bus and Spider-Man went to space. Not to mention, it’s common knowledge that Spider-Man works with Stark on occasion, and it’s also widely known that you are Stark’s intern. And, at the same time you mysteriously got the internship, Spider-Man got a suit upgrade. You have to be blind to not figure out that Peter Parker is Spider-Man.” Peter stayed quiet, shocked that it was so obvious. Thinking that Peter was quiet because he thought she was creepy, MJ added, “I’m not creepy. I’m just very observant.”

Snapping out of his stupor, Peter said, “Ok, ok, fine. You got me. I am Spider-Man.”

“Wait, really?” MJ asked. “I-I wasn’t positive. Like, only 67% positive.”

Peter raised his eyebrow. “You sounded pretty positive to me.”

Ned cleared his throat. “Okay, now that MJ knows, I can ask my real questions. How was it in space?”

Peter's mind went back to when he was in space. When he met Mr. Doctor Strange and the Guardians. When he looked up and saw millions--no, *billions* --of stars. When he and Mr. Stark crashed the giant, floating, donut thing. "It was beautiful," he said after a while. "You see tons of stars." Peter's mind began to remember what else happened up there in the stars. When he had fought Thanos. When Mr. Stark got stabbed. When he had turned to dust in Mr. Stark's arms. He cleared his throat, stopping his daydreaming quickly. "And there's no way I'm going back up there."

"What about the fight with Thanos?" Ned asked. "Y'know, the one at the Compound!"

*All he felt was the grief welling up in him as he watched yet another family member die. All he heard was Tony's heartbeat growing weaker and wea--*

Peter quickly pushed the memory away, unwilling to finish that particular flashback. "It was cool. Fighting with all of the Avengers."

Ned smiled. "I wish I was there."

And, just like that, the flashback finished in Peter's mind.

*--ker. Dimly, he wondered when Mr. Stark had become Tony in his mind. Finally, he heard a sound and saw a sight that he would never forget. It was the sound of Tony's heart stopping, never to be heard again; and the sight of his arc reactor going out, never to be lit again.*

Peter shook his head. "No, you don't."

MJ joined in on the questions. "Did you hear about Captain America?"

Peter turned to her in alarm. "No, what happened?"

"Apparently, he got lost in time when he went back to return the Infinity Stones. He came back as an old man. Actually, he passed away today."

Ned gasped. "Was it an accident? Or did he purposely go back?"

MJ shrugged. "No one's certain, but the general census is that he purposely went back in time, to go back to when he 'died' back in '45."

Peter looked at the table, frozen in shock. Captain America was gone. He had thought he and Mr. Rogers had connected during their conversation. He thought that he could get through the weirdness of being back after five years of being "dead" if Mr. Rogers could get through being alive after being "dead" for sixty-six years. But if Mr. Rogers couldn't handle it and had to go back in time, then what did that mean for Peter? Was it really that hard to stay in this new, changed world? Peter was also looking forward to talking with the captain after their conversation in Wakanda last week. But that was no longer an option, as the captain had passed away. And maybe Mr. Rogers wasn't interested in talking with Peter again, since the captain had left before they would talk again. *He hadn't even said good-bye*, Peter thought, choking back his tears.

Mr. Rogers' departure was just another thing to add in Peter's long list of things that had changed between five years ago and now.

Mr. Rogers was just another person to add in Peter's long list of people who had forgotten him; of people who had slipped away without saying a word to Peter.

Peter stood up suddenly, realizing that he didn't want to have this conversation.

“Peter?” Ned asked.

Peter didn’t reply; simply standing up and leaving the sandwich place, the bell tinkling softly behind him.

...

The rest of the day, Peter walked around the city. He paid little attention to his surroundings, focused only on calming the sea inside of him. He felt guilty for leaving MJ and Ned so quickly and also for his feelings that he was unwanted by the people around. He knew that his loved ones’ intentions were not to make him feel unwanted, and it was that understanding that created his guilt and caused him to not talk to his family about his feelings. Everyone was happy he was back, so he should be feeling happy. But he wasn’t, which just created more guilt. Around sunset, Peter found himself in a park, looking out at the East River flowing underneath the Queensboro Bridge. How he got there, he had no idea. The bridge was, roughly, a half-hour walk from his apartment building. Peter sighed when he felt his phone ringing. He pulled it out and groaned when he saw it was Happy.

“Hey, Happy,” he said, answering the phone.

*“Kid, thank God,”* the man replied. Peter pulled the phone away from his ear as Happy shouted to someone on the other end. *“May, he answered!”*

*“He did?”* Peter could hear May shouting back in the distance. *“Is he alright?”*

*“Kid, May’s here,”* Happy said, beginning to inform him of May’s question. He supposed that, if he had normal hearing, he wouldn’t have been able to hear her. But, thanks to enhanced hearing, he could easily hear every word. *“She’s wanting to--”*

“Know if I’m alright. I can hear her. And, yes, I’m fine.”

Happy relayed his message back to May. He then directed the conversation back to Peter. *“What happened? We’ve been trying to call you all afternoon. I called your friends, but they said that you had left the shop soon after getting there. And they said that you looked to be in a hurry.”*

“I’m sorry about worrying you. And May. Like I said, I’m perfectly okay. I just wanted to take a walk. Y’know, clear my mind and stuff.”

Happy gave a huff. *“What happened to you telling me when you got there? And about texting me when you left? Or about telling me if you planned on doing something else besides eating lunch with your friends?”* Happy sighed. *“There’s a reason why I told you to do that. It’s so me and your aunt don’t jump to the worst-case scenario whenever you don’t answer your phone!”*

Peter winced. He definitely understood what the worst-case scenario would be. He was reminded of it whenever he closed his eyes.

*Peter didn’t want to leave them behind. He didn’t want to go. He didn’t want to go. He didn’t want to go. PleasesirIdon’twanttogo.*

“Happy, I’m very sorry. I know I messed up and it won’t happen again. I promise.” Peter stood up. “Look, I’m heading home now, okay? I’ll be there in half an hour.”

*“No, you’re not walking by yourself. Not with the sun coming down.”*

“Happy, I’ll be fine, okay? I’m a sixteen-year-old superhero; I can take care of myself.”

Happy stayed silent for a couple of seconds. *"Fine. But you better be here quick."*

"I'll be fast."

With that, Peter left the river behind him, turning to head deeper into Queens. The sun continued to fall, casting longer and longer shadows. The buildings around Peter were bathed in a deep orange color, a sight that Peter supposed would be pretty if he was in a mood to appreciate it. As it was, the orange color looked nightmarish and unwelcoming. He debated putting on his Spider-Man suit, so that he could swing home, cutting the travel time in half. However, he quickly vetoed that idea, realizing that his suit was at home. He didn't dwell on the fact that, as soon as he thought of swinging home, he was reminded of dying on a foreign planet in Mr. Stark's arms or of Mr. Stark's heart stopping. No, the Spider-Man suit had no correlation with those two things (even if he had been wearing the suit during those memories). Eventually, he arrived home. However, he didn't feel any relief or a feeling of homecoming. If anything, coming home gave him a sense of homesickness, a feeling he pushed away instantly. If May and Happy were happy in that apartment, then so was Peter. He walked through the front doors of the apartment, the sun setting the instant he did so.

## Chapter End Notes

Well, that's the end of today's chapter! Stay tuned for next week's chapter!



# Chapter Four

## Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday to everyone! Sorry for the late update today. I hope you enjoy this week's chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### Part One

*A lonely speaker in a conversation*

*Tuesday, September 5, 2023*

On the first day of school, Peter stood in front of his school. Over the weekend, he had gone shopping for new school things with May. Happy was unable to go with them since there was some issue at Stark Industries, forcing him to go in to work. Staring up at the building, Peter sighed, not looking forward to the first day of school. At that moment, someone appeared next to him.

“Hey, Peter.” He turned around to see Ned standing next to him.

“Hey, man,” Peter replied. “Look, I’m sorry about Saturday.” The day after visiting with Ned and MJ, Peter had sent them both a text apologizing for his quick departure. Both of his friends told him not to worry about what had happened, but Peter still felt guilty about it. After that one text conversation, Peter had turned off his phone, unwilling to look at the news stories about the chaos of the return of the Vanished.

“It’s fine,” Ned said. The pair quickly started doing their handshake. “Want to compare our schedules?”

Peter opened up a picture of his schedule on his phone while Ned brought out a paper copy of his. Shockingly, their schedules were the exact same, including their electives. They also noticed that “Study Hall” had been removed, replaced by a period called “Blip Class.”

“Why are our schedules the same?” Ned asked Peter.

“Yeah, that’s weird. It hasn’t been the same since...”

“Never,” Ned finished. “And what is ‘Blip class?’”

“Apparently, it’s a class that is supposed to teach us about how much the world has changed in the past five years,” a voice said. Peter looked up from his and Ned’s schedule to see that MJ was in front of them. “Not that we need a class to tell us that. Just look around.”

And it was true. Similarly to the rest of the city, the school was surrounded by abandoned buildings. Peter also didn’t recognize any of the students around them. Yes, Midtown was a large school with many students, but Peter had known the kids in his class since preschool.

MJ continued talking. “And they tried to make sure that all the Vanished kids have similar

schedules. It seems that you two lucked out with the exact same schedule, since you signed up for the same electives.”

“Wait,” Peter said. “How do you know all this?”

MJ shrugged. “I have my resources.”

*Okay*, Peter thought. *That’s a bit creepy*. However, Peter found himself finding that as endearing, not as creepy as other people would think.

“Wanna see my schedule?” MJ asked. “We can test my theory.”

They all took turns looking at MJ’s schedule and MJ’s theory was proven correct. However, MJ’s two electives did differ from Ned and Peter’s, but that was just because she was interested in art and reading, two subjects that the boys stayed far away from.

“Ugh, Flash Vanished as well?” Ned asked. Peter followed his eyesight to see that Flash had, indeed, Vanished. After all, why would he be parking his car in the student parking lot if he was actually twenty-two?

“I hope MJ’s theory is incorrect,” Peter said. “Cause I do not want to follow Flash around.”

MJ frowned. “I’m not wrong.”

“You’re 67% positive of that fact?” Peter asked.

MJ gave Peter one of her few smiles, not her traditional smirk. The smile caused Peter’s cheeks to flush and to feel lighter than air. MJ turned around, walking towards the main entrance of the school. “See you later, losers,” MJ called over her shoulder.

“Wait!” Ned called. “Don’t we have first period together? We can walk together!” But MJ had already disappeared from view.

Peter looked at the time on his phone, realizing that they only had a few minutes before the first bell would ring. “Let’s just go to…” Peter looked at his schedule for guidance. “Room 241. AP Chem with Mr. Harrington.”

Ned’s face scrunched up in confusion. “Didn’t we already take that class?”

Peter blinked, then looked at the rest of the schedule.

**Name: Parker, Peter B.**

**Grade: 11**

**Student Schedule for Semester 1 (09/05/2023-12/20/2023)**

| Period | Course Title | Room | Teacher        |
|--------|--------------|------|----------------|
| 1      | AP Chemistry | 241  | Harrington, R. |
| 2      | Spanish III  | 140  | Sanchez, M.    |

|    |                         |           |             |
|----|-------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 3  | AP Calculus AB          | 205       | Goodwin, K. |
| 4  | AP US History           | 425       | Bates, H.   |
| 5  | Lunch                   | Cafeteria | N/A         |
| 6  | AP Computer Science     | 125       | Collins, I. |
| 7  | Blip Class              | Library   | Foster, J.  |
| 8  | Economics               | 122       | Hansen, W.  |
| 9  | P.E.                    | Gym       | Wilson, T.  |
| 10 | AP Language/Composition | 308       | Stone, V.   |

"It's the same classes as last year," Peter realized. "And it still says that I'm a junior."

Ned and Peter exchanged a confused look. "Maybe we have to retake them?" Ned supplied as an answer. "And because of that, we're still juniors?"

"But we already took the midterms. In fact, we were just a month away--"

The ringing of the bell interrupted Peter's words. "Dammit," Ned said. "We're late."

The two friends hurried into the school, intent on trying to get to first period as fast as possible. Neither of them noticed a man sitting on a bench outside of the school, staring attentively at the two friends. When they entered the school, the man stayed seated on the bench, watching the school.

...

The rest of the day was uneventful. Each teacher had the same monotone voice as they read off of their syllabuses; syllabuses they proclaimed were different from other teachers' syllabuses, but, in reality, weren't. By the end of the day, Peter was beyond ready for the last day of school. School also added to the chaos that was Peter's life now. Each period contained reminders of the five years Peter had missed. At lunch, the cafeteria was filled with students that Peter didn't recognize. Some of his classes also had students that didn't Vanish and looked at Peter as if *he* was the new kid, not them. All-in-all, it wasn't the best first day of school Peter had. Then again, most first days were not the best.

After school, Peter said good-bye to MJ and Ned. He started to walk in the direction of Delmar's, remembering at the last second that May had told him it had shut down. *Shoot*, Peter thought. *What am I going to eat?* Thanks to his quick metabolism, he was already beginning to feel hungry. If he had to wait until the end of his curfew to eat dinner, he was most likely going to die from starvation (not that he was being dramatic or anything). Peter figured that he would just go out as Spider-Man

and get something from a food truck.

Satisfied with his new plan, Peter walked to the same alley he always used to change. He took out his suit, the first one Mr. Stark had given to him. While Mr. Stark had told him to keep the Iron Spider, Peter didn't feel comfortable using it. Just looking at it brought back memories of death, both his and Mr. Stark's almost death. Even thinking about going out as Spider-Man conjured up images from the battles on Titan and at the Compound. While it made Peter nervous to be Spider-Man again, it felt like something he just had to do. It was the one spot of normalcy in the chaotic, new world Peter was living in. His mentor had become a husband and a father without him. His aunt had married someone without him knowing it. His school and city had changed over the past five years, albeit subtly, but it still had changed. His classmates and teachers had aged without him. Captain America was gone. The only thing that Peter felt he could hold tight to in the raging storm around him was the idea of Spider-Man. Spider-Man felt like his lifeline, his anchor in the storm. If Spider-Man was taken away from Peter because of some stupid flashbacks, he felt that he would lose all hope in finding a way to navigate the world. After all, if Captain America couldn't handle it and had travelled back to when he had "died," how could Peter Parker ever hope to survive the cultural shift? Spider-Man thought... Spider-Man had stolen Captain America's shield in Germany right from the captain's hand. He had held his own when fighting the Rogue Avengers. If he could do that, then surely Spider-Man could handle being resurrected.

Peter quickly changed from his normal clothes into the suit, shoving his clothes into his backpack. He pulled the mask on, shoving the memories of what happened the last time he wore the suit away.

*"Good afternoon, Peter," the suit's AI, Karen, said. "It's good to see you again."*

"Hey, Karen," Spider-Man replied, smiling. With each second, he felt his fears and worries disappearing. "It's good to see you, too. What do we have today?" Karen was connected with the police scanners and knew about the various crimes that were taking place around Queens. Using her as a GPS, Spider-Man could quickly get to places and people in need of superhero assistance.

*"There seems to be a robbery taking place at the gas station on Thomson Avenue." A map with the gas station pinned to it appeared on Spider-Man's HUD. "Would you like me to plot a course there?"*

"Yes, please, Karen." On the map, Karen highlighted a route from his current location to the gas station. Spider-Man webbed his backpack to a wall in the alley, hoping that no one would take it during his eight-hour patrol. He then began to swing his way towards the robbery.

...

The rest of the evening passed by quickly. Spider-Man stopped the robbery at the gas station easily, finishing up before the police had even arrived. He also helped the police in a high-speed chase, swinging exhilaratingly through the streets of New York. While those were the only two major crimes he came across, he still enjoyed his patrol. Many people in Queens called a greeting out to him, clearly pleased that their superhero was back. Hearing their shouts of excitement made Spider-Man very glad to be back helping his city once again. By the time 9:30 came around (thirty minutes before his curfew ended), Spider-Man felt amazing. He was heading back to the alley he had changed in when he heard a cry for help. Deciding to help one more person before calling it a night, Spider-Man swung off towards the sound.

Arriving at the scene, Spider-Man saw a man with a knife threatening a woman. He landed at the front of the alley, neither of them noticing his arrival. The street lights in the street in front of the alley were off, giving the alley a dark, nightmarish feeling. Suddenly, Spider-Man's spidey-sense

went off. Confused, he tried to pinpoint what it was signaling, but he saw nothing. There was no giant, floaty, donut thingy in the sky; no cars in sight; no people around, save for the man and woman who still haven't seen him. Ignoring his spidey-sense, Spider-Man stepped forward.

"Give me the purse!" the man yelled.

"I don't have any money, I swear!" the woman cried.

"Like hell you don't!"

"Hey, man," Spider-Man said. "The lady said she doesn't have any money. So why don't you leave her alone?" It wasn't his best greeting by far, but it did the trick since the man forgot all about the woman he was threatening.

The man whirled around, eyes widening when he saw Spider-Man. "Spider-Man?"

"Yep, that's me," he said. "The one and only."

"But everyone thought you died."

"Apparently everyone was wrong. Anyways, I'm going to ask you to drop that knife now. Please and thank you."

The man gripped the knife tighter. "Not a chance." He ran towards Spider-Man, bringing up the knife to stab him.

Spider-Man easily leaned back to avoid the knife. The man brought the knife around for a second swipe, but Spider-Man pressed on his web shooters, releasing his webs. Webs attached themselves to the blade of the knife. Spider-Man pulled on them, pulling the knife out of the man's grasp and sending it to the ground.

The man looked down at the knife that was on the ground then back up at Spider-Man in shock, who stifled a laugh. Bad guys seriously underestimated the skills Spider-Man had. Thanks to his enhanced senses, webs, and a spidey-sense, the criminals never stood a chance. To think that they did was laughably stupid.

"Wanna call this a night?" Spider-Man asked, looking down at his imaginary watch. "It's kinda close to my cur--"

Suddenly, Spider-Man realized that the man was standing right in front of him. He looked up from his left wrist to find the knife was back in the man's hand. Blood was on it, but whose blood was it? Confused, he looked down at his right arm to find it had gone through the suit. It was bleeding from the slice that was about as long as the knife was. It wasn't a major wound, maybe a glorified paper cut, but it still confused Spider-Man. What had happened? The knife was just on the ground, how did it end up back in the man's hand? And why hadn't his Spidey-sense gone off? It should've warned him--but it hadn't.

The man was stepping forward again, the knife coming up to stab Peter in the stomach. He quickly backed up, but tripped over his own feet, falling to the ground. The knife continued in its trajectory and Peter closed his eyes, preparing for the stab that was com--

It never arrived. Peter opened his eyes to find a new person standing in front of him, his hand gripping the knife man's hand. Peter's savior tightened his grip, causing the man to drop his knife for the second time.

"I think that's your cue to run away now," the newcomer said. He let go of the man's hand, who quickly ran away, his knife forgotten. Peter looked around to discover that the woman had run off as well. She had most likely left as soon as the man had started to attack Peter. The newcomer turned back around to face him. A street light flickered on--the light a pretty shade of orange, giving the darkened alley a welcoming feeling--giving him the chance to see his savior clearly. Peter suddenly realized that the newcomer was a superhero just like him.

He had a green suit on, with golden gauntlets, boots, and a chest plate. His maroon cape flowed behind him, reminding Peter of Mr. Doctor Strange's loyal cloak. The weirdest part was his fishbowl helmet, filled with swirling blue mist. It was the helmet that had informed Peter that he was looking at a vigilante just like him. Oddly, Peter's spidey-sense twinged a little bit, warning him belatedly about the close brush with Death he just had.

"You alright, kid?" the hero asked, reaching out a hand to help him up.

Spider-Man stopped staring at the hero, taking the hand being offered to him. "I'm not a kid."

Even unable to see his savior's facial expression, he still knew that he was raising an eyebrow. He didn't say anything, though, opting instead to introduce himself. "I'm Mysterio."

"Spider-Man."

"Do you get stabbed often?"

Spider-Man shook his head. "I didn't get stabbed, only sliced."

"My apologies for not understanding the difference," Mr. Mysterio said sarcastically. "'Cause there is such a major difference between the two."

Spider-Man could feel himself warming up to the man. Obviously, he had saved him, a fact that instantly made Spider-Man want to know more about his savior. Mr. Mysterio's sarcasm was also similar to Mr. Stark's, who was constantly calling Spider-Man out on his crap. Mr. Mysterio had done so twice now, knowing that Spider-Man was a kid and understanding that there was no real distinction between a knife stab and a knife slice; both were knife wounds and could've killed him easily.

At that moment, five people arrived at the front of the alley. Spider-Man recognized the knife man near the back of the group. The man in the front of the group stepped forward, instantly earning himself the name "Boss" in Spider-Man's mind.

"Heard you two were causing some issues with one of my family members," Boss called out to them. *Shit*, Spider-Man thought. *We just angered a gang.*

"Perhaps because your 'family member' hurt one of *my* family members," Mr. Mysterio responded. Spider-Man glanced at the man, aware that he had just called him "family." *Probably just part of the act*, he thought, shrugging it off.

Boss' face contorted in anger, but, at who, Spider-Man couldn't tell. "Still gives you no right to chase my family off. I'm 'fraid we're gonna teach you why." He started forward, his four "family members" following behind him. As much as Spider-Man hated to admit it, all five did look similar; each had the same evil eyes, same crooked nose, same smirk on their faces. Maybe they really were a family.

"You ready, kid?" Mr. Mysterio asked, crouching into a fighting stance. Green runes and mist began to circle around his hands.

Spider-Man felt his feelings for the man increase tenfold. If the Avengers were there, they would have told Spider-Man to stay back, not trusting his abilities to take care of himself. Instead, Mr. Mysterio was more than welcome to have Spider-Man there, asking him for his help. "I'm always ready."

With that, the two leapt into the fight. Spider-Man tried to stay back, using his webs to fight off the five men. He managed to web one to the ground, turning to see Mr. Mysterio target his green mist at one of the guys. When the mist cleared, the man was lying on the ground. Distracted, Spider-Man almost didn't see the punch coming his way, dodging it in the nick of time. He punched back, pulling his punch to make sure he didn't hit hard enough to kill the guy. It worked, since the guy fell to the ground, clearly knocked out. Mr. Mysterio used his mist on the last two men, knocking them out instantly. All together, the fight lasted less than five minutes and was insanely easy. Spider-Man webbed the five gang members together, hearing seven total heartbeats in the alley. There were no hidden attackers nor did the two heroes kill the gang members, an ideal that Spider-Man always followed, even with Vulture a few years back.

Satisfied, Spider-Man turned back around to face Mr. Mysterio. "Thanks," he said.

"No problem," Mr. Mysterio said. "Just doing my job."

"No, not about helping with the attackers. I'm thanking you for earlier; y'know, when you saved my life."

"I know. Like I said, just doing my job. And I should be thanking you for your help with those five." He gestured to the webbed men. "You did good, kid."

Spider-Man smiled, even though he knew Mr. Mysterio couldn't see his smile.

"*Peter,*" Karen said. "*Your curfew is ending in five minutes.*"

"Dammit!" Peter exclaimed, making Mr. Mysterio look at him in alarm. "Look, I'm sorry, sir, but I gotta go."

"Go? Is something wrong?"

"No, no, not at all, Mr. Mysterio. Y'see, my au-my family is expecting me back home in a couple of minutes. If I'm late, they'll kill me."

"Ah, I understand completely. I should be leaving as well. See you later, Spider-Man."

"Bye, Mr. Mysterio! And hey, I would love to go beat up some bad guys with you another time, okay? If you're in the area, feel free to see me!" Peter had enjoyed meeting the superhero and was already eager for their next meeting.

"Will do, kid. Have a good night."

Peter gave Mr. Mysterio a quick wave then began to swing back to the alley in order to pick up his backpack. Thank God it was on the way towards his apartment. He didn't look behind him, so he didn't see the five men and the knife disappearing into thin air. Peter also forgot about the cut on his arm, meaning that he didn't see how the cut on his suit and arm disappeared the second he left the alley. The street lights on the street also turned back off when Peter left, so the cameras on the street failed to notice anything odd. Peter was focused on one thing and one thing only: Getting home before ten o'clock. As such, he didn't notice any of the warning signs that not everything was as it seemed.

A man appeared in front of the alley Peter just left, watching Peter swing away. He stared at the disappearing figure of Peter. “Good,” he said. “Everything’s unfolding as I planned.”

## **Part One**

*A lonely speaker in a conversation*

**End**

### Chapter End Notes

And that's the end of part one! I hope you enjoyed this week's chapter and that you've enjoyed reading part one. See you next week for the start of part two!



# Chapter Five

## Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday! Hope y'all had a good weekend. I hope you enjoy this week's chapter and the start of part two!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## Part Two

*He starts to notice empty bottles of gin*

*Friday, September 8, 2023*

The next couple of days passed quickly for Peter. School was as boring as always and patrols were as fun as always. May worked long hours at FEAST, which Peter discovered was a non-profit organization that helped homeless people. With the Vanished reappearing, many people were displaced, as the government ruled that the homes that were resold after their owners Vanished belonged to the current owners, not the Vanished owners. Since May was busy helping with the insanity at the shelter, Peter didn't see her much. Peter also didn't see Happy that much either, since he was out doing whatever it is that he does. So, Peter spent his time going on patrols. In the days following his first run-in with Mr. Mysterio, he didn't see the new superhero. He tried to go online to see any news regarding the hero, but he didn't see anything. Friday, however, offered Peter the chance to see Mr. Mysterio.

Peter was sitting on top of a building, scrolling through his phone, trying to find any crimes, and eating a sub. He had found a sandwich shop that had opened during the Blip and--dare he say it--was better than Delmar's. He had just started his patrol roughly four hours ago and it was already proving to be a slow day. Peter was debating whether he should head home early to start work on an essay when his spidey-sense went off. Spider-Man stuffed the rest of his sub in his mouth, and stood up with alarm, turning to face the new threat. However, he quickly lowered his guard when he saw that it was only Mr. Mysterio.

Spider-Man waved, unable to say anything past the sandwich.

"Hey, kid," Mr. Mysterio said. "How's your evening?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Uneventful," he said, finally finishing his bite. He pulled his mask back down from the top of his nose back to its normal position. "What're you doing out here?"

"Well, you said that I was welcome to, as you put it, 'beat up some bad guys with you.'"

Spider-Man gave a wince, hearing the amusement in Mr. Mysterio's voice when he repeated Spider-Man's cringy words from Tuesday night. "You don't have to if you don't want to, sir. I mean, I understand if you have other things to do and don't have--"

"Kid, I'm here because I want to be here," Mr. Mysterio said, cutting his words off. Spider-Man looked up at the superhero, beginning to smile. "So, you ready to go beat up some bad guys together?"

“Sure thing, Mr. Mysterio! Just let me throw away my trash.” Spider-Man picked up his backpack and stuffed his trash inside of it. He planned on throwing out the sub wrapper once he got back home. He also tucked his phone back inside of the backpack, then webbed the bag to the roof. “Hey, Karen?” he asked.

*"Yes, Peter?"* He wasn't too worried about his AI saying his name; she could only be heard through his internal comms, not the external comms.

“Anything happening right now?”

*"There is currently a robbery happening in the bank below you."*

Spider-Man looked down and, sure enough, there was a robbery in progress. “Ready, Mr. Mysterio?”

“Sure, kid.” Mr. Mysterio walked next to Spider-Man. He looked down at the robbery below them. “Any plan of action or are we just going to barge in?”

Spider-Man bit his lip, thinking. There were three guys down below; one trying to pick the lock on the door and two standing guard on either side of him. All three of them had duffel bags hanging on their shoulders. Their attention was also only on the street, meaning they hadn't noticed the two heroes hanging out on the roof above them. Since he and Mr. Mysterio had easily handled being outnumbered five-to-two, Spider-Man wasn't worried about the odds. Besides, they had surprise on their side, something that Spider-Man had learned was the best form of attack. “No plan,” he decided. “Let's just wing it.”

“Sounds good to me.” They went down to the robbery, Spider-Man webbing down while Mr. Mysterio flew down.

“Hey, guys,” Spider-Man said. The three men turned to face him. Because they had masks on, he couldn't see their facial expression, but he imagined they were likely shocked at the two vigilantes' sudden appearance. “Do you guys own this place and just misplaced the keys? Is that why you're trying to break in right now?”

Spider-Man heard Mr. Mysterio's faint chuckle. At that moment, one of the men standing guard aimed his gun at Spider-Man. “Oh, am I wrong?” he said as he dodged the bullet that flew his way. “I feel like I'm wrong.” He webbed his attacker to the wall behind him, making him immobile and eliminating him as a threat.

Meanwhile, Mr. Mysterio had aimed his green mist at the second guy standing guard. He went down without a sound, clearly knocked out. While he and Mr. Mysterio had taken care of the two guards, the guy picking the lock had managed to open the door.

“Hey, Mr. Mysterio!” Spider-Man called. “What do you think? Do you think I judged the situation poorly?” The last criminal rushed into the bank and took out a device from his duffel bag. Spider-Man recognized the device as alien tech made by Vulture. Spider-Man sighed when he noticed that. Those things were a nuisance to deal with. If he remembered correctly, the first one he had dealt with had misfired and had caused a fire at Delmar's.

“I'm afraid so, kid,” Mr. Mysterio replied. He flew through the open door, Spider-Man hot on his heels. “I think he's trying to rob the place.”

*"What?!"* Spider-Man exclaimed. “No way!”

The man was standing at the ATM now, using the alien device to open it up. He then began to

stuff the money into his bag. It was almost comical watching him continue his crime while Mr. Mysterio and Spider-Man stood there, watching him.

"I guess you're right," Spider-Man said, kicking at the ground. "I was wrong." He sighed.

This time, Mr. Mysterio gave an actual laugh. "Kid, you sound so sad."

"That's because I am!" Spider-Man cried. "I pride myself on being a good judge of situations and I can't believe that I judged it that wrong!"

Mr. Mysterio shook his head. "I can't believe I chose to hang out with you. You're such a drama queen."

Spider-Man smiled dopely. "Aw, you love me, Mr. Mysterio. I know you do."

At that point, the man had filled his bag with the money. Spider-Man wasn't worried; after all, he and Mr. Mysterio were blocking the only exit. Spider-Man turned to face the final robber. "Dude, you know we're going to stop you. How about you put down the bag and we'll call it a night? Sound good?"

The man did put down the bag, much to Spider-Man's surprise. The shock dissipated when the man pulled out a gun. Honestly, why had Spider-Man even thought that the criminal was going to surrender? Luckily, it looked to be a regular gun, not one with alien enhancements.

Spider-Man webbed the gun and pulled it out of the robber's hands. Mr. Mysterio then used his green mist to knock out the criminal. "Piece of cake," Spider-Man said, high-fiving Mr. Mysterio.

"Good job, kid," the superhero said.

"Thanks, Mr. Mysterio," he replied. "Karen?"

"Yes?"

"Can you call the cops?"

*"They were alerted the moment the fight finished."*

"Thanks, Kare! You're the best!" Spider-Man turned his attention back to Mr. Mysterio, only to find the man seemed to be looking at him oddly. Granted, that was hard to tell, since his face was completely covered by his fishbowl, making it impossible to tell any sort of facial expression.

"What?"

"Who was that?"

"Hm?"

"Who was the person you were just talking to? Is it your girlfriend or something?"

"Oh! You mean Karen! No, she's my AI. She helps me to be Spider-Man."

"Your AI?" Mr. Mysterio asked. "Did you build her yourself?"

"No. Mr.--" Spider-Man broke off, unsure whether or not he could say who built it. "My mentor built it," he ended up saying.

"Stark?"

Spider-Man looked over at Mr. Mysterio with surprise. “Yeah, actually. How did you know that he was my mentor?”

“Kid, please. It’s obvious. You two do things together all the time.”

Oddly, Spider-Man remembered that he and Mr. Stark had only patrolled together once a month. All the time was a huge exaggeration. But that was before the Blip. Now, with Mr. Stark having lost an arm, Spider-Man wondered if the monthly patrols would continue. “I wouldn’t say all the time, Mr. Mysterio,” he said. “Only a little bit.”

“Did he build your suit as well?”

“This one, yeah. The first suit I ever had was built by me.”

“What about your webs? Or are they organic?”

“Ew, no. I came up with the formula myself. Mr. Stark helps tweak it here and there, but, for the most part, it’s mine.”

“You told him how to make your webs?” When he nodded, Mr. Mysterio shook his head in disappointment. Peter’s stomach swooped in guilt, fearful that he had made the hero upset. “And you trusted him with it?”

Peter looked at Mr. Mysterio oddly. “What’s with all the questions about Mr. Stark? And what do you mean, ‘do I trust him’? Why shouldn’t I?”

Mr. Mysterio looked away before replying. His tone had softened some, but not to the point of being condescending. “Kid, I’m not a fan of Stark. He steals other people’s work and claims it as his own. I’m afraid he might do the same thing to you.”

“Are you saying that Mr. Stark would steal my formula, say that it is his, then try to sell it to other people?”

“Yes. He’s done it before and he’ll do it again.”

Peter looked at Mysterio, disbelieving every word he had just said. “You’re crazy! I know Mr. Stark and I know he won’t ever do that!”

“Kid, tell me you’re not that naive. The man’s a billionaire. How do you think he got all that money?”

“By stealing other people’s work? Do you hear yourself? You’re wrong!”

“Kid, I’m just trying to look out for you.”

Peter looked away from Mr. Mysterio. All the adults in his life always said that. He didn’t need or want a babysitter. He was a superhero, for God’s sake. He had thought that Mr. Mysterio was unlike all the other people in his life and would trust him to make his own decisions. Apparently, though, he was wrong. “I don’t need anyone to look out for me, Mr. Mysterio. I have enough people in my life doing that.”

“Kid--”

“Thanks, Mr. Mysterio. See you later.” Spider-Man webbed up to the top of the building that he had left his backpack on. He began to rummage in his pockets for his web dissolver so he

could get his backpack. Perhaps he would end his patrol early and go work on--

“Kid, wait.” Peter turned around, surprised to see that Mr. Mysterio had followed him to the roof. The hero had grabbed Peter’s shoulder, keeping him from leaving. “I didn’t mean it like that. I trust your judgement. If you say you can trust Stark, then trust Stark. That’s your decision. However, I have my reservations. Just, please, kid, be cautious.”

Peter huffed, but he stayed on the roof. “Fine. I’ll keep your words in mind when I see him next.”

Mr. Mysterio gave a sigh of relief and took his arm off of his shoulder. “Good. Thank you.” They looked down at the bank below them, watching as police cars began to fill the street. “When do you have to go home?” Mr. Mysterio asked after a couple of moments of silence.

Peter looked at the clock on his HUD. “In about three hours. Sorry I had to leave so abruptly the other day. I have a strict curfew.”

“Does your family know about...” he trailed off, but Peter knew what he was saying.

“They do, actually.”

“And they let you continue doing this?”

“Yep.” Peter laughed, remembering the day that May had just found out that he was Spider-Man. “When they first found out, they didn’t let me do it. They came around, though.”

“Well, if they didn’t, I wouldn’t have met you. So good thing you’re able to be out here. Queens needs you, kid. Now more than ever. The Snap really messed things up.”

Peter nodded. He couldn’t agree more. “Yeah, it definitely did. I was one of the Vanished. Coming back is weird.”

“Weird how?”

“Um, well, everything changed so much.” Peter didn’t know how much he could explain without revealing who he was. He tried to avoid talking about his personal information with other people, but he didn’t know how to change the subject without being rude. “I guess you can say that my family has grown larger while I was gone. Trying to fit back in has been hard.”

Mr. Mysterio nodded, seemingly understanding what Peter was saying. “You mean you feel like your family doesn’t want you around anymore. You feel like they don’t love you anymore.”

Peter gaped at the hero. How had he come up with that implication from Peter’s words? But now that Peter was thinking about it...it did feel that way. May had created a new family, without him. Mr. Stark had also created a new family, without him either. But, no, they still cared about him. Mr. Stark had seemed so relieved to see him during the Compound Battle. May had cried literal tears of joy when she saw that he was alive. “No, I wouldn’t say that. They definitely still love me.”

Mr. Mysterio considered Peter’s words. “Maybe I judged them too harshly. Forget I said anything.”

“Already done,” Peter said. But he still couldn’t shake the thought that Mr. Stark and May didn’t want him around anymore. What if that was true? He hadn’t seen May lately, since she had thrown herself into her work at FEAST. Mr. Stark hadn’t texted or called, but, then again, they didn’t text or call that often. Peter would only call him after patrols and, on average, every four to five days,

just to check-in and make sure his mentor was okay. Mostly their conversations happened in-person, at the Tower. But Mr. Stark didn't live at the Tower anymore, meaning Peter's intern days--which happened two days a week--and the every other weekend visits were finished. As such, they hadn't talked since Peter had left the hospital in Wakanda, an entire week ago.

At the moment, Karen chimed in. *"Incoming call from Mr. Stark."*

*That's weird*, Peter thought. He was just thinking about his mentor. "Sorry, Mr. Mysterio, but I gotta take this." Mr. Mysterio waved his apology off. Peter walked a little ways away from the hero, not wanting him to hear his conversation. "Go ahead and answer his call, Kare."

A video call popped open in the corner of his screen. *"Hey, kid,"* Mr. Stark said.

"Hey yourself. Whatcha need?"

*"Oh, are we skipping the small talk and going straight to the reason why I called?"* Peter rolled his eyes. *"Don't you roll your eyes at me, mister."*

"Wha-How-" Peter stuttered. He knew for a fact that, while he had video feed of Mr. Stark, Mr. Stark wasn't receiving any video feed from him, so how did his mentor know that he was rolling his eyes?

*"I know you, kid. And, judging by your reaction, I judged you correctly."* Mr. Stark waited a beat before asking, *"How are you, Pete?"*

Peter refrained from rolling his eyes, not wanting to give Mr. Stark that satisfaction. "I'm doing very well, Anthony. Thank you for asking. How are you, Anthony?"

Peter knew for a fact that his mentor picked up on his sarcasm, being that Mr. Stark was the literal king of sarcasm. Sure enough, Peter was correct, judging from his mentor's next words. *"What did I tell you about calling me 'Anthony'? You're a little shit, you know that, right? Here I am, trying to call my favorite teenager, interested in hearing how he was doing. Instead, I get rolled eyes and sass. I know what I should do. I should--"*

"Call Mrs. Stark instead, since she won't act like this?" Peter supplied. "Hate to break it to you, but I think she would be worse than me."

*"No, no, that's not what I was going to say. What have I said about interrupting?"* Mr. Stark paused, offering Peter a chance to talk. Peter, instead, opted for silence. *"Pete, that was your cue."*

"But you said not to interrupt you!"

*"Peter, I asked a question. I stopped talking to give you a chance to talk."*

"I thought that it was a rhetorical question!" Peter smiled, loving as he heard, and saw, his mentor's exasperation. There was nothing better than messing with Mr. Stark.

*"Pete, stop. Just stop. I know you're smart enough to know social cues so I know you're just messing with me. Look, what I've been trying to say is that I want you to come up here for the weekend."*

Peter's jaw dropped. Did Mr. Stark just say that he wanted Peter to stay the weekend upstate? "Here as in the lake house?"

*"Yep. Only if you want to. I know--"*

“Hell yeah, Mr. Stark. ‘Course I want to see your new house. And Morgan, too.”

Mr. Stark chuckled. *“She has been dying to see you, Pete. Fair warning, she’s going to ask a lot of questions about your powers.”*

“Can I take her web swinging?”

“No!” Mr. Stark shouted. *“Absolutely not! Do you know how dangerous that is? Kid, just watching you gives me a heart attack. If I see her swinging around...”*

“Mr. Stark, I’m sticky! I’ll just stick myself to her. I promise I won’t drop her! I’ll even pinky promise!”

“No. And that’s final.”

Peter smiled slyly when a thought crossed his mind. “What’re you going to do when Morgan starts driving?”

*“Kid, don’t you dare put that thought in my mind. She’s four-years-old. That’s years away.”*

“Ooo, can I drive with you? When I’m at your house? Please say yes. Please, please, please--”

*“Pete, you know that’s a May thing. She’s in charge of that, not me.”*

“You’re just too scared to drive with me,” Peter accused.

*“I’m Iron Man, kid. Nothing scares me.”*

“If nothing scares you, then there shouldn’t be a problem with me taking Morgan out web swinging.”

Having the video feed from Mr. Stark was amusing. Peter could see the death glare Mr. Stark was currently giving him. Peter just smiled widely, knowing he had just won this verbal battle. *“You’re the worst, Parker. You know, I take it back; you’re not allowed up here.”*

“Too bad; I’m still coming.”

Mr. Stark sighed. *“Fine. May and Happy are invited as well. Come up tonight; it’s only two hours away so it won’t be that late when you arrive.”* With that, Mr. Stark ended the call. Spider-Man walked back over to Mr. Mysterio.

“Hey, sorry to dip, but I have to go. Impromptu family vacation.”

“Sounds like fun. How long will you be gone?”

“Just for the weekend. I’ll be back Monday. Wanna catch up then?”

“Sure. Catch you later, then.”

Spider-Man grabbed his backpack and gave Mr. Mysterio a wave. He leaped off the roof, swinging his way back to his apartment.

He thought back on what Mr. Mysterio had said. It had seemed that the hero was wrong, seeing that Mr. Stark had just invited him to his house for the weekend. Why would he have done that if he didn’t want Peter around anymore? But what had Mr. Mysterio meant when he said that Mr. Stark would steal his web formula? No, that had to be wrong. Mr. Stark wouldn’t do that. Not at

all. He smiled as he heard the various shouts of alarm and joy people called out to him while they saw him swing past them. The day was beautiful and there was no need to focus on Mr. Mysterio's negative thoughts. Not when he could do what he loved, which was swinging through the streets of his city and helping people in need. He swung home quickly, wanting to see his mentor as soon as possible.

## Chapter End Notes

Ooo a visit to the lake House coming up! Hopefully Mr. Mysterio's wrong in his assumptions about Mr. Stark....Anyways, hope you enjoyed this week's chapter and see you next week for Chapter Six!



# Chapter Six

## Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday! This past week has been crazy for me. I hope y'all's weeks were better than mine was. I hope you enjoy this week's chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## Part Two

*He starts to notice empty bottles of gin*

*Saturday, September 9, 2023*

Peter, May, and Happy arrived at the lake house late that night. While their destination was only two hours away, traffic had made it twice as long. Even though it was Saturday and he had a late night, Peter still woke up early, looking forward to spending the day with Mr. Stark. Going to the kitchen, he found Mr. Stark cooking breakfast. He had a metal arm attached to his right shoulder. It seemed that Mrs. Stark was right: Mr. Stark had gotten a prosthetic arm. Peter bit back on any jokes about him being the next Winter Soldier, knowing that the jokes wouldn't be taken well.

"Morning," Peter said. "You're up early."

His mentor looked up from the bacon that he was frying. "I could say the same for you. It's..." He looked over at the clock hanging on the wall above the dining room table. "Eight o' clock. Roughly five hours before your normal Saturday time."

Peter shrugged. He hopped up on the counter next to the stove. "I wanted to see you."

Mr. Stark raised his eyebrow. "And you expect me to believe that? After the sass you gave me yesterday?"

Peter smiled. "Okay, okay, you got me. I woke up early because I wanted to sass you some more."

"Ah. That sounds more like the Peter I know. Anyways, kid, how has your week been?" Mr. Stark asked, putting the bacon onto a plate covered with paper towels. He then handed the plate over to Peter.

"Okay," Peter replied, taking a piece of bacon off of the bacon plate. "Did you know that they're making me retake junior year?"

Mr. Stark's face wrinkled in confusion. "Seriously? But weren't you, like, two months away from finishing?"

"Not even!" Peter exclaimed, pointing at Mr. Stark with his bacon. He took a bite of it while saying, "I already took the midterms as well."

Mr. Stark frowned. "And they're making you retake them?"

"Yeah, it's stupid. I can even remember the questions on the Spanish midterm. Like that one really

hard problem.” He closed his eyes, trying to remember the exact wording. He opened them a few moments later and recited, with terrible Spanish pronunciation, “‘Traducir la frase en español, usando los pronombres complementos: The boy gave the flowers to the girl.’ I don’t even know what pronombres complementos are!”

Mr. Stark laughed. “I can’t believe you still remember all of that.”

“Still? Mr. Stark, I took those tests, like, four months ago!”

“And that’s my point.” Mr. Stark opened a cabinet and pulled out a box of pancake mix. “You’re in charge of the pancakes.”

“Me?” Peter said, gesturing to himself. “You do know that I burn everything I cook, right? I’m related to May.”

Mr. Stark shoved the box into Peter’s hands. “Kid, I’m standing right next to you. There’s no way I’m going to let you burn our breakfast.”

“Mr. Stark, I really don’t--”

“Pete, I can’t do the pancakes and the eggs. Besides, you’re going to college in two years. You need to learn how to cook sometime.”

Peter looked apprehensively at the box of pancake mix. Gingerly taking it, he said, hesitantly, “Okay...”

Mr. Stark just chuckled, taking the carton of eggs and milk out of the refrigerator. “Mixing bowl is in that cabinet there. The griddle’s over there and the spoon and spatula are in that container next to the stove.”

Peter hopped off of the counter and began to grab the various things from the spots that Mr. Stark had just listed off. “What about the measuring cup?”

“Dish drainer right there.”

Peter read the instructions. “You know, I think this might be outside of my cooking skill.”

“Kid, you’re adding water and the mix together. Morgan helps me with the pancakes. If she can do it, you can.”

Peter eyed the measuring cup, the mix, and the bowl with fear in his eyes. He really did not know how to do this. It was rare for him to be having a cooked breakfast. The most cooking he ever did was put a couple of frozen waffles in the toaster. And even those ended up burnt, but that might be due to the ancient toaster that he and May had, not lack of skill.

At that moment, Happy walked in. “I can’t believe that--”

“Happy!” Peter cried. “Look, I need you to make the pancakes.”

“Uh, sure?” Happy said, taking the box of pancake mix from Peter, confusion written everywhere on his face.

“Thanks, Happy!” Peter said, returning to his spot on top of the counter.

“Peter, no,” Mr. Stark said. “That’s not how this works. Everyone needs to help somehow.”

“And everyone has a job. You’re making the eggs and Happy’s making the pancakes.”

“And what about you? See, you don’t have a job. So, *you--*”

“What do you mean I don’t have a job?” Peter said, incredulously. “I’m the taste taster!” He snagged another piece of bacon from the bacon plate. “Duh,” he said, eating the bacon in one bite. “It’s r’lly g’d.”

Mr. Stark stared at Peter while Peter finished his bacon. His lack of movement caused Peter to shout at him after he swallowed his bite. “Mr. Stark, you gotta make the eggs! Come on, you’re not doing your job!”

Happy chuckled. Mr. Stark turned around to glare at him. Happy cleared his face from any amusement, simply shrugging his shoulders. “Kid’s right, Tony. You’re not doing your job.”

Mr. Stark shook his head, clearly exasperated with the two of them. Peter simply grinned, not able to stop himself from adding, “I told you I woke up early so I can sass you.”

Mr. Stark broke. He snatched the bacon away from Peter. “That’s it. You lost your countertop privileges. You can’t sit up there anymore. Find a new chair.”

Peter jumped down from the counter. Then, looking his mentor dead in the eye before doing so, he flipped up onto the ceiling. He ended up sitting with his legs crossed, entirely comfortable in his new seat.

“That’s it, kid,” Mr. Stark said. “You’re kicked out. You’re no longer part of this family. Nope. Go home, back to whatever spider nest you live in.”

Happy looked affronted by Mr. Stark’s words. “‘Whatever spider nest you live in’?” he repeated. “‘*Whatever spider nest you live in*’? I’ll have you know that he lives in *my* spider nest. So if you’re bad mouthing his house, you’re bad mouthing my house.”

Mr. Stark raised his hands in surrender. “Wow, you two are ganging up on me. In my own house. I’m hurt. Extremely, very much hurt by your--” He broke off, seeing Mrs. Stark walk in at that very second. “Pep, honey, can you help me out?”

To her credit, Mrs. Stark didn’t look extremely confused as she took in the sight of Happy mixing pancakes, Mr. Stark holding a carton of eggs, and Peter sitting cross-legged on the ceiling. She was only slightly confused as she stared at Peter for a second before looking at Mr. Stark, a small frown on her face. “Tony? Why is Peter on the kitchen ceiling?”

Peter pointed at Mr. Stark. “It’s his fault. He told me to get up here.”

“No, I--” his mentor stuttered. “Pep, that’s-Kid--”

Peter laughed, seeing Mrs. Stark’s growing confusion and Mr. Stark desperately trying to dig himself out of the hole Peter had put him in. This moment was one of several moments that made Peter feel so incredibly grateful for his family. *See, Mr. Mystério?* he wanted to say to the hero. *My family does want me. They do care about me.*

...

Morgan and May came downstairs a little after Mr. Stark and Happy had finished making breakfast. They ate breakfast slowly, both the Starks and the Parker-Hogans exchanging stories from the past week. However, Peter found himself left out of the conversation, as May asked Mrs.

Stark about various work projects the CEO was working on. Happy also talked to Mr. Stark about a security meeting in California--at a SI location that Peter had never heard of. Morgan, too, kept up an ongoing conversation with her imaginary friend, Spider-Boy, opting to ignore Peter in favor of talking with the imaginary friend that was based off of his alternate persona. After eating, they dispersed, May and Mrs. Stark heading into the kitchen to wash the dishes, Happy leaving to take a call, and Mr. Stark going to help Morgan get ready for the day. Peter found himself alone, as much ignored as he was during breakfast. Already dressed and ready for the day, he decided to give himself a tour of the house. Walking around, he saw the living room and another dining room. This dining room was a fancy one, one that people probably weren't allowed in. He walked outside, breathing in the fresh air of the forest surrounding the house. He saw a lake a little ways away, a dock sitting next to it. Peter walked down the stairs from the porch onto the lawn. He saw a shed standing next to the house. Curious as to what was in it, he made his way over there.

Inside, he found a lab. Slowly beginning to smile, Peter looked around. He saw tech strewn all over the place, stacked on the desks or on the floor. Surprisingly, it seemed to be less messy than the labs at the Tower and the Compound were. Stepping in, the lights turned on and Peter heard FRIDAY turn on.

*"Good morning, Mr. Parker," the AI said.*

"Hey, FRI. How's your day going?"

*"My day is fine, though I should remind you that my day is incapable of being anything but."*

Peter chuckled. "It was just a conversation starter. No need to get all worked up." He walked over to a desk, looking at all the labeled drawers. "Jeez," he commented. "Mr. Stark got better at organizing while I was gone."

*"Mrs. Stark had held a workshop on organization for him."*

Peter laughed. "Of course she did." He saw a drawer labeled *Current Projects*. Eager to see what his mentor was currently working on, he opened the drawer. Inside, he found a very familiar looking notebook. Frowning slightly, he opened it up. Realizing why it was so familiar, his frown deepened. It was his old chemistry notebook from sophomore year. Meaning it had his original web formula in it. He flipped through the various pages filled with different versions of his web formula. He stared at his notes, his confusion growing with each page he turned. Why did Mr. Stark have this notebook? If he remembered correctly, the notebook was in his nightstand. The nightstand that had been emptied while he was gone. May had probably given it to Mr. Stark when she found it, figuring that his mentor would probably want any work associated with Spider-Man. But that still didn't answer Peter's biggest question: Why was it in a drawer labeled *Current Projects*? The answer came to him as Mr. Mysterio's words flooded his head.

*"He steals other people's work and claims it as his own. I'm afraid he might do the same thing to you."*

No, Peter thought. He refused to believe that was true. There had to be some other reason as to why his notebook was sitting in that drawer. Maybe Mr. Stark had misplaced it. Maybe Peter didn't have the whole picture. He turned to the final page, his heart dropping when he saw what was written on the latest version of his webs.

*Can be used as bandages in medical emergencies.*

Peter hadn't added that. Peter had never even thought about how his webs could be used in different situations, only focused on how they helped him be Spider-Man. He looked at the

handwriting closely, recognizing it as Mr. Stark's writing.

Peter fell to the floor, realizing that Mr. Mysterio was right along. Mr. Stark was planning on taking Peter's formula--the formula that took him ages to perfect--and was planning on claiming it as his own. Mr. Stark was wanting to resell it to other people, something that he had never talked to Peter about.

"Kid?" A voice outside of the shed called.

Standing up quickly, Peter shoved the notebook back in its drawer. He closed it and turned around the instant that Mr. Stark walked in. "Mr. Stark!" he said, intent on appearing anything but normal.

"There you are, kid," Mr. Stark said. "Mo's wanting to see you in action after hearing Pepper's story from this morning."

"Okay, I'll be right there."

Mr. Stark nodded, turning back around. Peter gave a sigh of relief as he watched Mr. Stark leave. His mentor hadn't noticed anything strange about Peter's behavior. Peter looked down at the *Current Projects* drawer. Should he ask Mr. Stark about it? Or should he act like he hadn't seen anything?

"Coming, kid?" Peter looked up to see Mr. Stark holding the door open for him.

"Yeah," Peter said, walking out of the shed. He watched as Mr. Stark locked the shed up. *No*, Peter decided. *I'm not going to mention anything.* He followed Mr. Stark to the porch, seeing Morgan eagerly waiting for the two of them. He ran up the steps, picking up the little girl. He laughed with her as they spun around. He tried to put Mr. Mysterio's words out of his head, deciding to just focus on having a fun weekend with his family.

...

But it didn't work. Mr. Mysterio's words haunted him everywhere. He found himself wondering if Mr. Stark wanted him there when his mentor spent the entire afternoon trying to get Morgan to take a nap. He found himself wondering if May truly cared about him when she got an urgent call from work, forcing her to drive back to the city. A part of him wondered if he was simply making mountains out of a molehill, yet he still found himself thinking back on the hero's words. If Mr. Mysterio was right about Mr. Stark stealing his formula, then didn't logic state that he was right about his family? That evening, after Morgan had gone to bed, he and Mr. Stark sat on the couch, watching the news. The news reporter was talking about a new superhero that had just arrived in New York. With a jolt, Peter realized that they were talking about Mr. Mysterio.

"--have been talking about how the new vigilante has saved them," the reporter said. "*People have also stated that the hero has been spotted with Spider-Man.*" A video from the failed bank robbery from the night before appeared on the screen. There was no audio and no color, but Peter could clearly see himself and Mr. Mysterio fighting the three robbers.

"Kid, who's the person that they're talking about?" Mr. Stark asked.

"Mysterio. I met him Tuesday."

"And you didn't tell me?"

Peter immediately became defensive. How dare Mr. Stark question the fact that Peter didn't tell him when he didn't even tell Peter that he was planning on giving his web formula to other people?

"I don't have to tell you about every person I meet."

Mr. Stark ran a hand over his face. "No, you don't. But a new superhero? That you've been hanging out with on a daily basis? Pete, that's--"

Peter interrupted him. "It hasn't been that much. I met him on Tuesday and I was with him last night. That's it."

"Peter, it's still dangerous. What if he finds out who you are?"

Peter went quiet. "Mr. Stark, I'm being careful. I haven't told him anything about my personal information. There's no way he could ever find out who I am." And even if he did, Peter wouldn't be that worried. Mr. Mysterio was good and he did care about Peter, enough to share his concerns about Mr. Stark with Peter. Peter thought that the new hero was trustworthy, maybe even trustworthy enough to be trusted with his identity--though that was still a thought that caused Peter's breathing to increase and his heartrate to spike.

"Pete, my decision still stands. Stay away from this Mysterio guy. I don't want him anywhere near you. We have no idea who he is, what he wants, or if he's good or bad."

"Mr. Stark, he's been helping me with my patrols. In fact, he saved my life," Peter added, remembering when he first met the hero. "I think that means he's a good guy and he wants the same as me: To help as many people as he can."

"We still don't know who he is."

"And how is that any different than me? Isn't that the point of wearing the mask? So people don't figure out who you are and target your friends and family?"

Mr. Stark sighed. "Fine. You got me there. But that brings me to my next point: If he finds out who you are, he might attack May or Happy or, hell, maybe even Morgan. This is why vigilantes work on their own."

"Work on their own?" Peter repeated, standing up from the couch. "*Work on their own?* I don't think I have to remind you of what happened the last time I worked on my own." Images of dropping into a lake with a parachute wrapping around him like a cocoon and of a building falling on top of him and of a plane crashing on a beach filled Peter's mind. Mr. Stark looked away, clearly remembering Vulture as vividly as Peter was at that moment. "You're not there helping me anymore. I know for a fact that you can't use your suits anymore. You live up here, a two-hour drive, *without traffic*, away from me. What if I get hurt on patrol and you can't get to me in time? With Mr. Mysterio there, he can help me whenever you can't. I think it's smart of me to have a-a-  
\_"

"Sidekick?"

"No!" Peter exclaimed. "Someone like-like a mentor, I guess."

"A mentor? Pete, are you trying to replace me now?"

"No! Not at all! I'm just trying to-to play it safe, y'know? Avoid what happened with Vulture. I learned my lesson about needing to have help, so I can be safe and make it home to May. And I think Mr. Mysterio can ensure that for me."

"Kid, I can move back into the Tower. Just so I'm able to be more hands-on. It's still Stark Industries property; in fact, I think the Penthouse is still up there, collecting dust."

Peter saw through Mr. Stark's offer instantly. "You just don't want me to be with Mr. Mysterio anymore. You could care less that I'm not safe anymore with you living so far away; you're just trying to make sure I stay away from Mr. Mysterio."

"Peter, you're bringing up valid safety concerns; concerns that I haven't even thought of before. I care immensely for your safety. And if keeping you safe also keeps you away from the new hero, yay."

Peter stayed silent for a couple of moments. "Nothing I say will change your mind?"

"Nope. He's dangerous. Because of that, I want you far, far away from him. Who knows, maybe HYDRA hired him or something. They've always wanted to create a super-soldier serum; they're bound to be interested in you. Maybe Mysterio's job is to become friends with you, then hand you over to HYDRA."

Peter's heart skipped a beat. "He wouldn't do that."

His mentor shrugged. "We have no idea. And guess why? We don't know who he is."

Peter looked away. While he understood that his mentor was only concerned with his safety, he still felt that Mr. Stark wasn't listening to him. While Peter was trying to assuage his concerns, Mr. Stark kept brushing him off, always circling back to the fact that they didn't know who Mr. Mysterio was, regardless of the fact that that was the whole point of wearing a mask. Peter found himself thinking about the differences between Mr. Mysterio and Mr. Stark. Mr. Mysterio would've trusted Peter to make his decisions, unlike Mr. Stark who was telling Peter what to do. That much was proven when he had shared his concerns about Mr. Stark with Peter. The hero had told Peter to make his decisions, rather than simply telling him what to do, which was what Mr. Stark was doing at that moment. Peter felt himself liking Mr. Mysterio's response over his mentor's response.

"Fine," Peter said, praying that Mr. Stark didn't see through his lie. "I won't hang out with him."

Mr. Stark nodded. "Good. I'll talk with Happy and May tomorrow about your safety."

Peter didn't miss the fact that Mr. Stark didn't say that Peter was invited to that conversation. Again, more decisions were being made for him, without him having a say in the matter. But he only nodded, not wanting to argue with his mentor anymore. Already, he was thinking of ways to see Mr. Mysterio without Mr. Stark's knowledge.

...

May stayed in the city for the night. The work emergency had turned out to be bigger than she had originally thought, forcing her to work late into the night. Peter and Happy left the lake house the next day. Since May had taken their family car back to the city, Mr. Stark let them borrow one of his many cars. Peter gave each of the Starks a hug before leaving. Once Happy had pulled away from the house, Peter sighed with relief. While it was nice to see Mr. Stark and get to know Morgan more, his and Mr. Stark's argument was still fresh in Peter's mind. He also couldn't shake the fact that Mr. Mysterio was right in his warnings about Mr. Stark.

"You alright, kid?" Happy asked, turning his head to the side to see Peter, who was sitting in the passenger seat.

"Yeah, I'm fine," he replied. "Just happy to get back home."

Happy looked at him oddly. "I thought you liked seeing them."

"I do, I do," Peter quickly reassured him. "I have some homework I have to get done before school tomorrow."

"So you're happy about going home so you can do your homework?"

"Sorta."

Happy was quiet for a couple of seconds. Then, he turned back to face the road, a smile on his lips. "You're one weird kid."

Peter laughed. "That's an understatement."

Happy chuckled. "I guess you're right. You're a spider-kid after all."

"No, I'm *the* spider-kid." Peter smiled as Happy laughed. He looked behind them at the disappearing figures of the Starks. Yes, he was happy to get home, but because he was leaving Mr. Stark. While he loved spending time with the man, everything was...different. Instead of spending the entire weekend locked in his lab with Peter like they usually would during their Compound weekends and internship days, Mr. Stark had spent a lot of time with Morgan. Not to mention, his mentor's plans with Peter's web formula were being kept from him. That and the fact that Mr. Stark didn't trust Peter to make his own decisions regarding Mr. Mysterio had caused Peter's trust in his mentor to be broken. Their relationship had already been cracking when Peter had returned back from the dead, but it had been completely dismantled during the weekend visit, thanks to the hidden notebook and Mr. Stark's dismissal of Peter's words.

Peter turned back around, facing forward again. He was going back to Queens, going back to hang out with a hero that actually cared and trusted Peter: Mr. Mysterio.

## Chapter End Notes

Peter, no! Don't trust Mysterio!

Translation:

"Traducir la frase en español, usando los pronombres complementos: The boy gave the flowers to the girl."--"Translate the sentence into Spanish, using object pronouns: The boy gave the flowers to the girl." Answer: El chico se las dio a ella. That's how I would translate and answer the question. I might be wrong; please correct me if I am.

I hope you liked this week's chapter! Stay tuned for next week!



# Chapter Seven

## Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday! I hope everyone's weeks were good. I apologize for the short chapter, but I hope you like it!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## Part Two

*He starts to notice empty bottles of gin*

*Monday, September 11, 2023*

After school on Monday, Peter quickly changed into the Spider-Man suit, eager to see Mr. Mysterio. Doubts circled in his mind as to if he should or shouldn't heed Mr. Stark's warnings. But then he remembered how easily his mentor had dismissed Peter's words as to why Mr. Mysterio could be trusted. If the man wouldn't listen to Peter, Peter shouldn't have to listen to him.

*But he's your mentor!* another part of Peter's brain cried. *You should listen to him!*

Shaking his head to clear his warring mind, Peter slipped the Spider-Man mask on. And just like that, all of his doubts and worries vanished as he became Spider-Man. He webbed away from the alley, a smile easily appearing on his face as he swung through the streets. After a weekend of being away, he was pleased to be back, helping his city.

During the next couple of hours, Spider-Man kept an eye out for Mr. Mysterio. Finally, as he was swinging past the hot dog stand near his old apartment, he spotted the hero, leaning against the railing on a rooftop.

Grinning, Spider-Man landed next to him on the rooftop, crouching on the railing. "Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to vacate this roof."

Mr. Mysterio chuckled. "Hey, kid. How was your family trip?"

Peter grimaced, remembering the notebook and the argument he had with his mentor. "Oh, spectacular. The greatest fun I've ever had." He jumped down from the railing, leaning against it as Mr. Mysterio pushed away from it.

Mr. Mysterio's easy tone left as he noticed Peter's sarcasm. "Wanna talk about it, kid?"

Peter looked down at the street below, watching the cars and people streaming past. "You were right," he said after a few seconds. His words were soft, barely able to be heard above the traffic below them. "About Mr. Stark."

Mr. Mysterio didn't say a word, letting Peter tell the story on his own time. Peter added his silence in his list of differences between the hero and his mentor. Mr. Stark would be clamoring Peter with questions, not waiting for Peter to think through his thoughts first.

"I was looking around in his lab and that's when I found my old notebook." Peter cleared his throat

before explaining. "I wrote down my web formula in it and had pages and pages of how to make my webs. Anyways, it was in a drawer marked *Current Projects*. The last page contained an idea that Mr. Stark had about using the formula in a different manner. He already took it from me and now he's planning on selling it, without telling me. So, yeah, you're right."

"Kid, I'm sorry," Mr. Mysterio said, putting a hand on Peter's shoulder. "I know that you were so adamant about the fact that you could trust him, so I know this must be hard for you."

Peter nodded. It was hard for him to wrap his mind around it. "That's not all. All weekend, he spent quite a bit of time with his daughter." Peter's mind flashed back to when Mr. Stark spent all of Saturday afternoon putting Morgan to sleep. He also remembered how the man had vanished after breakfast, helping Morgan get ready for the day. "And I get why and all, and I guess that it is a bit selfish of me; wanting to spend time with him when he has a needy four-year-old kid. I shouldn't have expected any--"

"Kid, you're rambling," Mr. Mysterio said, interrupting Peter. "Sure, there's a good reason for him to ignore you, but that doesn't change the fact that he ignored you. Just because you understand why and feel like he has a good excuse doesn't change the fact. Don't push away your feelings just because Stark has a reason. Your feelings matter, kid, and so do you."

For some reason, the hero's words hit Peter hard. Was he pushing away his feelings because he felt that he had to? Because Mr. Stark was right in spending more time with Morgan than Peter? And wasn't that what he had been doing, ever since he came back from the dead? Pushing away his feelings of being unwanted or unneeded, simply because he felt that those around him expected him to be happy? After all, that was his reasoning behind his mantra that if May was happy, then he was happy.

Maybe it was time for Peter to accept his own feelings, and not push them away just for the sake of pleasing other people.

"Thank you, Mr. Mysterio," he said, meaning every word.

"Don't mention it, kid," the hero replied. "Did Stark say anything else? You still seem upset."

"He heard that I've been hanging out with you. He got upset and told me to stay away from you."

Mr. Mysterio chuckled. "Well, I can see that you followed his instructions."

Peter chuckled as well. "Yeah, I'm pretty good at following his instructions." The ferry incident flooded through his brain and he shook his head quickly to remove it.

"Did he explain why he didn't want me near you?" Mr. Mysterio asked.

"Stupid stuff, really. He said you can't be trusted, since we have no idea your motives or your identity. I told him that you're a superhero; your motives are obviously to help people and you should be keeping your identity a secret. I do, so why shouldn't you be entitled to a secret identity?" Next came the part that Peter was truly worried about. This one, out of all other concerns Mr. Stark brought up, scared him the most. "He thought you could be using me. Like, gaining my trust and planning on betraying me. He thought you could be working with HYDRA."

Mr. Mysterio laughed. "Seriously? That's what he thought?" He laughed again. When he saw that Peter wasn't laughing with him, he quickly stopped. "Kid, don't tell me that you think that's true."

"It is a possibility."

Mr. Mysterio shook his head. "Yes, it is, but it's not true. Kid, I care about you. You know that."

And Peter did know that. Wasn't Mr. Mysterio the one who trusted Peter to make his own decisions? Wasn't Mr. Mysterio the one who could say the right things to make Peter feel better? Mr. Mysterio never broke his trust; Mr. Mysterio never brushed Peter aside.

Mr. Mysterio continued talking. "And if I care about you, then why would I do that?"

"Alright," Peter said. "You're right. But it's still not enough for Mr. Stark."

Mr. Mysterio sighed. "Fine." Peter watched, in shock, as he took off his helmet, showing Peter his true identity.

Peter had never met the man. There was nothing remarkable about him, but his face did look familiar to him; familiar in a way that made Peter feel like an idiot for not figuring out why it was familiar. He had brown hair and he had ice blue eyes; eyes that seemed to stare into Peter's soul. He had a beard that was the same color as his hair. Without him asking her to, Karen began to run facial recognition. Karen matched his face with a person named Quentin Beck, a former SI employee. His information stated that he was fired shortly after BARF was invented, an augmented reality program that he had created with Mr. Stark. Peter had vaguely heard of BARF. If he remembered correctly, the invention was overshadowed by the news of the Sokovia Accords.

"My name is Quentin Beck. I used to work for Stark, until he, too, stole my work and passed it off as his own. I've been struggling to make ends meet ever since and it was a miracle when I was gifted my powers. Using them, I hope to help everyone I can, save everyone I can, prevent what happened to my..."

He trailed off, but Peter sensed his backstory was very similar to Peter's own. Peter's own mission in life was to save as many people as he could, to prevent other people dying the way Uncle Ben had. The thought that Mr. Mysterio had gone through the very same thing that Peter had caused him to feel pity for the hero. But he didn't say anything, knowing that pity was the last thing the hero wanted.

"Thank you, Mr. Beck," Peter said. "I know that you're good; you have nothing to prove to me." Peter realized that Mr. Beck had just revealed who he was. The action not only proved to Peter that he could be trusted, but that he trusted Peter enough to share his identity with him. At that moment, Peter wanted to prove to the hero that Peter trusted him just as much, but he quickly realized that the only way to do that was to reveal his own identity.

No, Peter couldn't do that. Mr. Stark had brought up a good point; revealing his identity could put everyone Peter loved in danger. It was too dangerous to reveal who he was. But Mr. Beck's trust in Peter was making Peter feel guilty. If Peter truly trusted the hero, shouldn't he be pulling off his mask, revealing his identity?

And Peter grew angry at the new thing that he felt guilty for. All he ever felt after coming back was guilt. He felt guilty for what felt like everything, and he didn't want to feel that way with Mr. Beck, not when the hero was one of the few people in Peter's life that truly trusted and cared for him.

Shaking all the thoughts away, Peter pulled his mask off, not wanting another thing to feel guilty about.

"Since we're done using the made-up names," he said. "I'm Peter Parker, then." He looked up at Mr. Beck's ice blue eyes, eyes that had widened in surprise. Making eye contact with the hero, Peter realized what he had just done. His eyes widened and he felt his heart rate raise as his

thoughts spiraled out of control.

He had just revealed his identity to a total stranger. His identity--something that he had tried to keep a secret from May, Ned, MJ, everyone in the world--that he just revealed. A secret that could result in the deaths of everyone and anyone he cared about. All because he didn't want to feel guilty. How stupid was he? Did he just reveal himself because he didn't want to feel guilty anymore? He was stupid. He was an idiot. He--

"Peter," Mr. Beck said. Peter snapped back to reality, realizing that he had just been having a panic attack. "Relax. It's okay."

Peter stepped back. "No, it's not." He put his hands on his head, yelling, "God, I'm an idiot!"

"Peter, listen to me! You're not an idiot. You're brave." Peter looked at the hero, shocked. How did Mr. Beck come to that conclusion? "Pete, you just revealed who you are. That takes serious guts, kid. It's not an act of stupidity to reveal that to me. You just met me last week; it shows how brave you are to be that honest with me."

Peter took a deep breath in. He held for a couple of seconds, then exhaled, pushing all his tension away. "Right. Yeah, I guess I am brave."

Mr. Beck smiled. "You are, Pete, you are. You're out here being a superhero, at twelve."

Peter grinned. "I'm sixteen, not twelve."

"Excuse me for not seeing the difference," Mr. Beck said. It was almost the exact same thing he had said to Peter when they had first met. It was similar enough to cause Peter to laugh.

"In all seriousness," Mr. Beck said, instantly causing Peter's mode to turn somber. "How have you been adjusting? I know you said that you were one of the Vanished. How has it been?" Mr. Beck leaned against the railing as he listened to Peter answer his question.

"Weird. Extremely weird. Everything's the same, but not at the same time. And, like I mentioned on Friday, I've been having problems adjusting to the changes in my family. Mr. Stark got married and has a daughter now. And she has grown up hearing these amazing stories about me as Spider-Man, but I'm not this great and amazing hero. Hell, I got myself killed. She knows it as much as I do, too. She wanted to talk to her imaginary friend over me. And her imaginary friend is based on Spider-Man. And then my aunt--that's who I live with--she got married too. And now I'm back, but I don't really feel like I should be back. My aunt has been working so much, since it's been insane since the Vanished came back, and I don't get to see her as much as I did before the Blip. Mr. Stark has been taking care of Morgan and I just feel like I don't belong anymore."

Mr. Beck looked thoughtful. He looked away, but turned to face Peter after a couple of seconds. "What about Spider-Man?"

Peter began to smile as he thought about how it was to return to being Spider-Man. "Spider-Man has been incredible. Everyone seems to like me being out here and every person I save just reminds me of how much Queens needs me."

Mr. Beck pushed himself away from the railing. "What I hear is that you need to become more like Spider-Man and less like Peter Parker. I know what you need to do."

He started to walk away from Peter, but Peter followed him, hurriedly putting his mask on. "Wait! Mr. Beck, what are you talking about?"

“Meet me here tomorrow, right after school lets out. I can’t tell you now, but I can tell you tomorrow.” With that cryptic message, Mr. Beck put his helmet back on and flew away from Peter, leaving him alone on the rooftop.

Peter stared after him, thoughts running wildly through his mind. What had Mr. Beck wanted to show him? What did he mean by how Peter needed to be more like Spider-Man and less like Peter? It was that idea that struck a chord within Peter. Wasn’t that what Peter had always thought? If he was more like Spider-Man, he could’ve prevented Uncle Ben’s death. He could’ve prevented his own death. He could’ve prevented Mr. Stark from Snapping. He could’ve been able to stop the storm of guilt from drowning him. Peter had always wanted to be more like Spider-Man; to be able to prevent every misfortune in the world from happening; to be able to use his powers without fear of being harmed for it. And at that moment, Peter made a decision.

Whatever plan Mr. Beck had, Peter would follow it.

All Peter wanted to do was to be Spider-Man completely and forget the life of Peter Parker.

Whatever it took.

## Chapter End Notes

That's a stupid decision, Peter! Trusting Mr. Beck--tsk, tsk. What's he thinking?  
Anyways, I hope you enjoyed reading this week's chapter and keep watch for next week's!

# Chapter Eight

## Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday! I hope you like this week's chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### Part Two

*He starts to notice empty bottles of gin*

*Tuesday, September 12, 2023*

The next day at school, Peter constantly fidgeted. The clock couldn't seem to go any faster as he waited with impatience for school to let out. His mind went through different ideas that Mr. Beck could've been thinking of. Each one was as unlikely as the next; each one growing more and more extreme as the minutes slowly ticked by. Peter's foot bounced up and down, his impatience growing as the minutes slowly turned to hours. By lunch time, even Flash had picked up on Peter's behavior, teasing Peter about his nervous habits. Peter ignored him in favor of watching the clock above the cafeteria. Finally, the final bell rang and Peter all but ran to the rooftop Mr. Beck had told him to meet on. He stopped only once, hurrying into an alley to slip on his suit.

With the suit on, Spider-Man used his web-shooters to make his way to the rooftop. He arrived at the meeting spot, moving quicker as he saw that Mr. Beck was already there, his fishbowl helmet on the ground beside him.

"Kid," Mr. Beck greeted, turning around to face Spider-Man.

He pulled the mask off. "Hey, Mr. Beck," Peter said. "What's your idea?"

Mr. Beck chuckled. "Eager, aren't you?" He leaned against the railing surrounding the roof. "Let me tell you a story first." Peter swallowed his impatience, forcing himself to listen to Mr. Beck.

"During the Blip years, I wandered the world, looking for a way to help people. Eventually, I gained these powers." He held up his hands as his green mist appeared. "But, while I was returning to New York, I discovered...something. This something was in a crater created by a meteorite that had recently crashed on Earth. It was a black substance and can only be defined as a symbiote."

"A symbiote?" Peter interrupted. "You discovered an alien symbiote?"

"Yes."

"Holy cow!" Peter exclaimed. "Do you know how crazy that is? Not only are there, like, aliens--the New York attack in 2012 revealed that--but there are alien parasites? That's insane. It's more than insane, it's--" Peter broke off as he saw Mr. Beck's raised eyebrow. "Sorry. It's really cool."

"Don't ever apologize for being the smartest one in the room, kid," Mr. Beck said. "Yes, I discovered a symbiote. It is not a parasite, though. You've taken biology, right?"

Peter shrugged. "I like chemistry more, but yeah."

“Then you are familiar with the three different symbiotic relationships?”

Peter nodded. He had known about them since elementary school. “A symbiotic relationship is any sort of relationship between two different organisms. The three main types are mutualism, commensalism, and parasitism. Mutualism is where both organisms benefit from the relationship. Commensalism is where one organism is helped and the other one is neither helped nor harmed. The last type is parasitism, a relationship where one organism is benefited, while the other one is harmed. The harm might be so bad that the host could be killed.”

“Exactly,” Mr. Beck said. “This symbiote falls under the mutualism type of symbiosis. It will help you be Spider-Man; make you stronger, quicker, better. At the same time, the symbiote is given a home. It can’t survive without a host.”

“Wait, so your idea is for me to accept this...thing?”

“Yes.”

Peter stepped away from Mr. Beck. “Woah, hold up, absolutely not. There is no way that I can do that. A symbiote? Living inside of me? No, that’s freaky as hell.”

“Peter, it’s completely harmless. Like I said, it’ll help you. It’ll teach you how to be Spider-Man better and help you to be accepted by your family. Think about it, Peter. You know that your family doesn’t want to be around you. Mr. Stark has been pushing you away in favor of spending time with his biological daughter. But that’s not all. Your aunt has been working non-stop. When’s the last time you talked to her, Pete?”

Peter couldn’t answer that question. All that Mr. Beck said was correct: May had disappeared and Mr. Stark did love Morgan more than Peter. Peter was stupid for ever thinking that Mr. Stark could’ve still loved Peter after the birth of his daughter.

“But Spider-Man, Peter. *Spider-Man*. Little Morgan Stark has grown up hearing bedtime stories of Spider-Man. Why do you think that is? Maybe it’s because Stark has always cared more about Spider-Man than regular-old Peter Parker. That’s why you two met in the first place, wasn’t it? Because Stark wanted to recruit Spider-Man? He doesn’t care about you, Pete. He never did. How could a billionaire like him ever care about sixteen-year-old Peter Parker?”

Peter felt tears prick at the corners of his eyes, but he refused for them to fall. He knew that everything Mr. Beck was saying was correct. Mr. Stark didn’t care about Peter and he never had. The only thing that had interested Mr. Stark was Peter’s powers. That was why he had met Peter in the first place; to use his powers in the fight against Captain America.

“Spider-Man is the only thing that concerns him. So why not become Spider-Man completely? And if the symbiote helps you accomplish that goal, why would you deny it? Because it’s a symbiote? Peter, that’s bullshit. So what if it is a symbiote? If it helps you accomplish your goals, who cares about the means?” He held up a jar that had been sitting on the ground next to him. The sides of it were clear, allowing Peter to see the black substance inside of it.

*All’s well that ends well*, Peter thought. But that still didn’t mean that it was a safe option. Symbiotes were things like ticks, leeches, and tapeworms. But those were parasites. Their relationship with its host was a parasitic one. Mr. Beck had already assured him that the black thing would help him, just like how Peter would help the symbiote.

The symbiote would help Peter be Spider-Man. So what if there were risks? Didn’t the good the symbiote would bring outweigh the risks? Peter suddenly remembered his declaration from the

previous night.

*Whatever plan Mr. Beck had, Peter would follow it.*

*All Peter wanted to do was to be Spider-Man completely and forget the life of Peter Parker.*

*Whatever it took.*

“Fine,” Peter said. He held out his hand, taking the jar from Mr. Beck. He opened it, looking down at the black glop inside of it. The black substance crawled up the sides of the container. He felt a spike of fear as it ended up on his hand. Watching it as it absorbed his suit--watching it take over the normal red and blue colors of his suit and changing it to black--freaked Peter out. It was like watching a cartoon of piranhas eating a fish in a matter of seconds, swimming away and leaving behind the skeleton of the fish.

*Oh God, Peter thought. What have I done?*

***You have made the best choice that you have ever made.***

Peter’s eyes widened as he heard the voice inside of his head. The voice was unlike anything he had ever heard before and sounded so...*alien*. He started to pull at the symbiote, deciding that the good did not outweigh the risks. Mr. Beck grabbed his hands, preventing him from stopping the symbiote as it wrapped itself over Peter’s face, creating a new mask snugger than any of his other masks. With its formation, Peter felt his fear melt away.

Mr. Beck let go of Peter’s hands. “Good work, kid,” Mr. Beck said. “Want to take it for a test-ride?”

Peter smiled. “I would love to.”

Mr. Beck put his helmet on and flew off the roof. Spider-Man followed him, whooping at the ease his web-shooters worked. If he was being honest, it felt almost automatic. He let go of his old mask, not caring as it fluttered to the ground. He didn’t need Karen anymore or easy-access to Mr. Stark. Why would he, when he had the symbiote helping him and Mr. Mysterio just a few feet away?

Mr. Mysterio turned around to face Spider-Man. “How’s the new suit?”

“Amazing!” he shouted back. “It feels incredible!” And it did. It fit Spider-Man better than any other suit ever had, including the Iron Spider with its nanites. He looked down, spotting a group of criminals breaking into a gas station. “Hey, Mr. Mysterio!”

“Yeah, kid?”

“Let’s test it out against some actual people!” Not waiting for Mr. Mysterio’s approval, Spider-Man swung down to the robbery. He walked inside of the gas station, causing the five robbers inside to freeze. Besides the person running the cash register, there was no one inside--a fact that he was grateful for. Spider-Man smiled. “Hey, guys.” He heard the tinkling of a bell and turned around to see that Mr. Mysterio had, indeed, followed him.

One of the bad guys stepped forward. “Got a new suit, Spidey?”

“Yep!” Spider-Man said proudly. He took a closer look at the robbers, noticing that their masks seemed to be fraying. “It looks like you guys need some new clothes as well.”



“Kid,” Mr. Mysterio interrupted. “Let’s just stop the crime.”

“Sure thing, Mr. Mysterio!” he called, bringing his hands up as his spidey-sense tingled, signaling danger. One of the robbers had raised his gun, pointing it at Spider-Man. Before he could press on his web-shooters, webs had already flown at the robber, webbing the guy to the wall. “Oh my God!” Spider-Man said, looking at Mr. Mysterio in shock. “Did you see that? I didn’t even activate them! It was automatic!”

Mr. Mysterio shook his head, clearly amused at Spider-Man’s praise. “I told you that the symbiote would help you.”

“And I believed you! Really, I--” Spider-Man broke off as his spidey-sense went off again. Before he could locate the danger, his webs had already stopped his attacker. His would-be attacker was webbed up to the wall, next to the first attacker. Spider-Man looked at the robbers, taking stock of the situation. Two of them were immobilized, thanks to his new, automatic web-shooters. Three of them were left. His heart dropped as he saw one of the three raise his gun towards the teenager running the cash register. However, his fear quickly dissipated as he remembered his new suit.

“Hey, dude?” he asked. “I’m going to ask that you drop that gun you’re holding.” He raised his arms and, seeing his intent, the webs attached themselves to the gun. He yanked on them, pulling the gun towards him. With his quick reflexes, Spider-Man easily grabbed the gun. He crushed it, allowing its remains and bullets to fall to the floor. The three robbers stared at the destroyed gun, then looked back up at Spider-Man. Then, as one, they ran outside, using the back entrance.

“What next?” Mr. Mysterio asked.

Spider-Man grinned. “Let’s see how these automatic webs work outside.” The two heroes walked through the back entrance, leaving the employee staring at the destroyed gun and the two people webbed on the wall.

The three robbers had gotten into a runaway car, an unfamiliar person at the wheel of it. With the appearance of the new guy, that made a total of six robbers, two out of the fight and four inside the getaway car. They floored the gas, sending the car screeching into the street. Horns beeped and people screamed as it took off.

“Let’s follow,” Spider-Man said. He jumped, then webbed to one of the buildings, following the car through the sky. Mr. Mysterio followed him, using his green mist to fly. They quickly caught up to the car, Spider-Man noticing that his new webs were working much, much faster. He landed on top of the roof of the car, his spidey-sense going off as one of the robbers inside began to shoot at him through the roof. Spider-Man hissed as he felt one of the bullets graze his left shoulder. He quickly webbed off of it, realizing that that wasn’t the smartest plan of attack.

“You okay, kid?” Mr. Mysterio asked.

“Fine,” Spider-Man said. Already, he could feel the scratch knitting itself back together. Still, he avoided using his left arm to swing, meaning he couldn’t use his left web-shooter. It made swinging hard, but it was better than aggravating the wound. “How should we stop the car?”

Mr. Mysterio was quiet as they followed the car. As the car turned left, heedless to the red light, he answered Spider-Man. “I’ll stop it with my powers. Be ready to use your webs.”

Spider-Man nodded, hanging back as Mr. Mysterio flew forward. He watched as the hero landed on the street, right in front of the speeding car. Spider-Man sucked in his breath as he saw that the car wasn’t stopping. Seconds away from impact, Mr. Mysterio raised his hands, green mist

appearing and stopping the car instantly. The driver and the passenger flew forward, flying through the windshield. They laid on the ground, unmoving. But there were still two criminals in the backseat of the car.

Spider-Man swung down to land beside Mr. Mysterio, ready to fight the robbers. But, no one came out of the car. Confused, Spider-Man lowered his guard, walking towards the car.

“Kid, stop!” Mr. Mysterio cried. “They might be playing possum!” Ignoring him, Spider-Man used his strength to rip off one of the back doors. There was silence while Spider-Man took in the two knocked-out criminals, his spidey-sense slightly tingling the entire time.

“What the hell?” he muttered, willing his spidey-sense to turn off. It didn’t, confusing Spider-Man more and more. Suddenly, it rose from a quiet whisper to a loud shout as the criminal closest to Spider-Man woke up, the gun in his hand coming up to hit Spider-Man in the face.

Reacting on instincts alone, Spider-Man leaped away, narrowly avoiding the gun. Mr. Mysterio, who was behind him the entire time, raised his hands, filling the car with his green mist. Once he lowered them, the two criminals were passed out in the backseat, clearly not a threat anymore.

Peter sighed with relief as he realized that the fight was over. He looked at the bullet graze on his shoulder, noting, with some surprise, that it was already healed. It seemed like the symbiote had also quickened his healing abilities, something that didn’t really need any enhancements. The suit also appeared unharmed, as the black substance seemed to move on its own, covering the “rip” from the graze easily. Seeing it meld back together, Peter was reminded of the nanites of Mr. Stark’s suit.

“You sure you’re okay, kid?” Mr. Beck asked, coming to stand beside Peter. “I saw that you got shot.”

“Again, you need to work on your descriptions of wounds. ‘Tis but a scratch.”

Peter could hear the rolled eyes in Mr. Beck’s reply. “Excuse me and my bad descriptions. How did the suit handle?”

Peter grinned. “It was fantastic!” he exclaimed. “Did you see how fast the webs were? And that it was automatic? Y’know, I think it might even be self-replenishing, since I didn’t have to reload a single time, even after the fight in the gas station and during the car chase. And the web-shooters are faster! It even helped my healing abilities. And I don’t have to mend the cut from the bullet! The symbiote stitched itself back up! Look!” Peter gestured at his left shoulder. Then, realizing that he had been rambling, he calmed himself, saying, “I love it, Mr. Beck. Thank you so much, sir.”

“No problem, kid,” Mr. Beck chuckled. “I’m glad you like the symbiote. I know you had your reservations--”

“Stupid reservations,” Peter corrected.

“Yes, stupid reservations,” Mr. Beck repeated, still chuckling. “Anyways, I have to go. Enjoy the suit!”

“Bye, Mr. Mysterio! See you later!” Peter watched as the hero flew away. He turned the other way, planning on patrolling up until his curfew at ten o’clock. He webbed away, looking for other crimes. He shouted in joy as he fell more and more in love with the symbiote. It was the greatest thing on Earth. His spidey-sense twinged slightly, but, after looking around, Peter couldn’t find the

reason why. He shrugged his shoulders, deciding not to worry about the malfunction.

He did a flip mid-air, and dived towards the street. “Yeah!” Peter yelled as his webs activated automatically, seconds before Peter landed on the ground. Really, how did he survive without the symbiote? It was incredible!

## **Part Two**

*He starts to notice empty bottles of gin*

**End**

### Chapter End Notes

End of part two! I hope you enjoyed this part and this week's chapter. See you next week for chapter nine and the start of part three!

# Chapter Nine

## Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday morning, everyone! I hope you enjoy this week's chapter and the start of part three!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## Part Three

*And if she had the proper words to say, she would tell him*

*Tuesday, September 19, 2023*

It had been a total of nine days since Tony had talked to Peter. Not that he was counting or that he was worried about the kid. Well, if he was being honest, he was worried about Peter. During Peter's visit a week ago, the kid had been acting...different. He hadn't been as talkative as he normally was and there was that argument that they had about Mysterio. While Tony understood that Peter wanted to hang out with superheroes other than him--as much as that hurt him to admit--Mysterio just didn't sit right with Tony. A new hero out of the blue; a hero who had taken an interest in his kid. It would make any mentor worry. Yet when he had mentioned his worries to Peter, Peter had ignored him.

And it was highly unusual for Peter to ignore safety in order to keep doing whatever he wanted to do. Now that Tony was thinking about it, maybe it wasn't that unusual. After all, wasn't that what Peter had done with Vulture? Tony had told him to stay away from the villain, yet he had found that the kid was still fighting him. But the kid had agreed to stay away from Mysterio, while, with Vulture, Peter had never agreed. Tony had just told him to stay away from Vulture, but he hadn't made Peter promise. But, this time, he had. Meaning that, since Peter had promised, Peter would follow Tony's instructions. Yet, Tony couldn't shake the thought that Peter could be lying. How could someone so adamant about trusting someone agree so easily to staying away from that "trustful" person? But this was Peter, for God's sake. The kid was incapable of lying. Tony would've been able to figure out if he was lying.

Tony's mind went through the other weird things that had happened during Peter's visit. Such as his abnormal behavior when Tony had found him in the lab Saturday morning. He had acted like he was hiding something from Tony and he had appeared to be deep in thought throughout the weekend after that. Tony hadn't commented on it, supposing that Peter was working on a secret project. While that unsettled Tony, he figured the kid had a right to work on individual projects if he chose to. Besides, maybe it was a project that Peter was planning on surprising Tony with. If he tried to look into the secret project and found that it was, in fact, a surprise for him, he would be devastated that he had ruined the surprise.

Pushing Peter's weird behavior out of his mind, Tony opened his phone, checking to see if he had received any messages from Peter. As he had expected, there was nothing, which was another item of concern. Normally, Peter would call following each and every patrol, letting Tony know what he had done, who he saved, who gave him a churro, etc. It used to be Happy's job, but that was before the Vulture fiasco. Peter would also text him, on average, every four or five days. However, since Peter's return, Peter hadn't sent him anything; text messages or phone calls. And they had last

talked nine days ago, a whole four days later than Peter's average amount of silence. Tony frowned, debating if he should be the one to reach out, rather than waiting for the kid to do so.

"Just text him," a voice said. Looking up from his phone, Tony saw Pepper walking up to him, moving from the kitchen into the living room. She had a plate with two pieces of buttered toast in her hand.

"Good morning to you, too," he said, taking one of the pieces of toast off of the plate. "How did you know what I was thinking about?"

"Because I know you," she replied, sitting next to him on the couch. "Seriously, text him."

Tony sighed, rubbing a hand across his forehead. "I don't know, Pep. He might just be doing his angsty teen thing."

Pepper raised her eyebrows. "Because of your argument? Tony, this is Peter we're talking about. A little argument you two had wouldn't make him ignore you for a week, not when he looks at you like you're the greatest thing in the world."

"Nine days, Pep," Tony corrected. "Not a week."

"And that just proves my point further." She offered the other piece of toast to him, then stood up to go back into the kitchen. "I have to take Morgan to Jo's house. Be back in an hour. Text him while I'm gone."

Tony nodded, watching her walk away. Jo was Morgan's preschool teacher and her preschool was about a forty minute drive away. While Tony and Pepper probably could've found a preschool that was closer, they had wanted to find one with the best safety and highest ratings. So, they had chosen Jo's Preschool.

He looked back down at the phone, still debating. After staring at Peter's contact picture (which was an adorable picture of Peter as a baby that May had sent Tony--much to Peter's embarrassment) for a solid minute, Tony tapped the *Message* button, thinking, *To hell with it.*

**Today 8:39 AM**

**I am Iron Man:** Hey, kid. How are you?

It wasn't the best starting text, but it was better than nothing. And, knowing the kid, he would get a message sometime in the next minute or two, even though the kid was at school right now. Peter would drop anything anytime he heard his phone vibrate.

Yet ten minutes passed without any word from the kid. Then thirty minutes passed without Tony's phone notifying him of a text. Tony felt his worry grow more with every minute that passed without a chime from his phone. Then, after two whole hours had passed by without Peter's reply, his phone started ringing.

Sighing with relief, Tony hurried to pick up his phone. He frowned when he saw that the caller ID said *May Parker-Hogan*. He answered the phone, fearing that the worst had come to pass.

"Hey, May," he said, choosing to act like everything was normal. "What's up?"

"*Do you know where Peter is?*"

And just like that, Tony's worry for Peter increased tenfold. "At school, right? It is Tues--"

*“Don’t give me that crap. The school called and said that he never showed up.”*

Tony quit the crap as soon as May had told him to. Gone were the days where he acted like a smart-alec with Peter’s aunt. “Did you see him leave for school? He still walks, right?”

*“Yes, he still walks. I didn’t see him this morning or last night. I had a late shift and I didn’t wake up until about twenty minutes ago.”*

“Well, what about Happy? Has he seen Peter?”

*“Happy’s on a business trip in California right now.”*

Now that May had mentioned it, Tony remembered Pepper telling him about a security meeting happening in California. And that Happy had been complaining about it when he was up here nine days ago. As the head of SI’s security, Happy was the one running the meeting. Tony ran a hand through his hair. Things weren’t looking good for Peter right now. He had been missing for who knows how long and he hadn’t answered Tony’s text. But that was only *his* text. Maybe he answered May’s. “Did you try texting or calling him?”

*“Yes, I did. That was the first thing I did after the school called me ten minutes ago. He hasn’t responded.”*

“Shit.”

“Shit,” May repeated.

Tony was definitely freaking out at that moment. His thoughts kept jumping from what could have happened and his brain kept supplying images of an injured Peter somewhere, bleeding out. “I’m going to ask Karen about his whereabouts. Maybe he’s patrolling right now.”

*“If he is, I’m going to kill him.”*

Under normal circumstances, Tony would’ve laughed and responded back with a joke. However, in the current situation, he didn’t. He stood up from his spot on the couch and placed his phone on the coffee table. He put it on speaker phone, enabling him to still hear May with his hands free. However, he did mute himself, knowing that he would have to talk with Karen. He grabbed his tablet from the end table, easily unlocking it and opening up the app that tracked Peter’s suit and vitals while in the suit.

“Good morning, Mr. Stark,” Karen said, activating the instant the app opened. Tony winced at the form of address. When he had first coded Karen, he had made his form of address “Tony.” However, it seemed that the kid had taken advantage of Karen’s coding, which dictated that she learn from imitating the people around her. Which meant that Peter had corrupted the coding and the AI had picked up on Peter’s annoyingly polite manners.

“Hey, Karen,” Tony replied. “Is Peter’s suit activated?”

*“Yes, Mr. Stark.”*

Tony cursed. He moved to unmute himself, intending to tell May about what he had learned. Before he could do so, Karen talked.

*“I do not have access to his surroundings.”*

Tony’s face filled with confusion. How was that possible? “What do you mean, Kare? How do you

not have access to his surroundings? And what does that even mean?"

*"Peter has taken off his mask, meaning that my cameras--which are located in the eyes on his mask--cannot see where he is. His tracker is still on, and so are his--"*

"Back up," Tony interrupted. "Peter has his suit on, but he has his mask off?"

*"That is correct, Mr. Stark."*

Tony's confusion and worry grew. If Peter had his suit on, but his mask off...if Peter was skipping school and not answering his calls or texts...it was a situation that had no answers. At least, no good answers. Because Tony could only think of one plausible conclusion: Peter had been kidnapped during his patrol last night and his identity had been revealed. And Tony was willing to bet that the new hero, Mysterio, had something to do with it.

"How long has he been in the suit?" Tony asked, wanting to get an estimate on the timeline.

*"Three hours, twenty-eight minutes, and twenty seconds."*

Tony did the math and realized that something was off. If what Karen was saying was true--which it was, since she was made by him, a literal genius--then that put the kid in the suit at about 7:30 that morning. He picked his phone back up, unmuting it as he moved it to his ear.

"May, are you still there?"

*"Yes."*

"What time does Peter normally leave to go to school?"

*"Maybe 7:30-ish? School starts at eight."*

That's what Tony had thought, which made the situation even odder. His previous assumption rested in the fact that Peter was taken as Spider-Man sometime during last night's patrol. But that couldn't be correct, not if Peter had been in the suit when he was, supposedly, going to school. And Peter knew better than to skip school for his patrols, so he wasn't taken that morning. Or did he? Did Peter go on patrol instead of going to school, got kidnapped, and then had his identity revealed? Tony left himself unmuted while he asked Karen a question.

"Karen, did Peter come home last night?"

*"Yes, Mr. Stark. Peter arrived home last night a little before ten and took off his suit. Then, at 7:27 this morning, he put his suit on again before going on patrol."*

Tony and May were silent. He knew that May had heard Karen's answer and was sitting in confusion, just like he was. His thoughts rested on the fact that Peter was not on patrol. Yet Karen had never mentioned anything of that; she had just explicitly stated that Peter was on patrol.

"He's on patrol?" May asked.

*"Yes, May," Karen responded. "As near as I can figure. His tracker is moving erratically and it seems to stop at places that I have located a crime. His heart rate and breathing is up as well--which is typically associated with him being on a patrol."*

May cursed a word that Tony didn't know was in her vocabulary. However, it was a word that he was currently thinking--and had been thinking--on repeat. *"I am going to kill that boy. What does*

*he think he's doing? Going on patrol while school is in session? And he's not answering his phone?"*

"His mask is off, too," Tony added, his brain still going a million miles an hour as to what he should do next.

"*WHAT?!*" May yelled.

"Look, I'm coming down to the city," Tony said, finally deciding on the best course of action. "I'll find him."

"*I'm calling Happy.*"

"Good idea. I'll tell Pepper what's happening, too."

"*See you in two hours?*"

"Yes, I'll stop by your apartment before heading out," Tony sighed. "*God*, I wish I could fly a suit. I could be there in thirty minutes."

"*Don't you dare put a suit on. You know that doing so would delay your healing.*"

"I know, May, I know. But if it means that I could--"

"*I would rather you be here safely than here with a hurt shoulder. It's better in the long run.*"

Tony sighed. He knew that May was right, but that didn't mean he had to like it. He would be able to help with finding Peter more if he had a good shoulder than if he had injured his shoulder again. Especially if he had to talk with a certain spider-kid after his arrival in the city. "I'll be there in two hours." With that, he hung up then quickly dialed Pepper.

"Tony?" Pepper asked. "*I know I'm running late; I decided to stop--*"

"Peter's missing."

That stopped all of Pepper's words. He heard her breathing speed up on the other end as she realized the implication of Tony's words. "*Missing? For how long?*"

"He's not really missing; his tracker is still active, but he's on patrol. He's not answering any calls or texts and his mask is off."

"*He's patrolling without a mask? Tony, something's wrong.*"

Tony sighed. "I know. He was acting strange when he was here last weekend."

"*Agreed. Are you going to go to the city?*"

"Yes. I'm getting ready to go now." Tony grabbed the tablet monitoring Peter's location and started to walk in the direction of the front door. "Don't worry; I'm taking a car, not a suit."

"*Good. I'll be home soon. Do I need to call Happy and tell him about Peter?*"

"May's on it already."

"*Call me when you find any information about Peter.*"



“Will do. Bye. Oh, and Pep?” he asked before she could hang up.

“*Yes?*”

“I love you.”

“*I love you, too, Tony. Be careful.*”

Tony ended the call. By that time, he had made it to the car and was sitting in the front seat. He placed his head on the top of the steering wheel and just breathed. After a couple of seconds, he sat back up. He started the car and shifted the car into drive. “I’m coming, Peter,” he whispered. “Just hold on.”

## Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I hope you liked the chapter. Keep watch for next week's chapter!

# Chapter Ten

## Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday, everyone! I hope everyone's weeks were good and I hope you enjoy this week's chapter!

TW: There is a brief mention of suicide in this chapter. It's not talked about in great detail and it's not explicitly said (it's more inferred) but it does exist.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## Part Three

*And if she had the proper words to say, she would tell him*

*Tuesday, September 19, 2023*

Tony got to the city a little after one. He drove straight to the Parker-Hogan apartment, intent on finding Peter as soon as possible. Holding the tablet in one hand, he used the other one to knock on the door. May opened the door quickly, clearly waiting for his arrival. She was still in her pajamas, her long hair in a messy bun and her glasses askew on her nose.

“He’s on the news,” she said as a way of greeting. She turned to head back inside, leaving the door open so Tony could follow.

“Why?” Tony asked, shutting the door behind him as he followed her into the living room.

“The local news loves doing segments on Spider-Man whenever he appears. Since it’s daily, they have a whole five-minute segment called Spidey Watch. They even have a twitter account dedicated to sightings.”

Tony blinked in surprise. “I had no idea how much New York loves him.” After Peter’s death, Tony had found that he couldn’t stand any mention of Spider-Man. As such, he had stayed far away from any news on the hero, whether it was questions as to where he went or past articles describing his actions.

May nodded. “Anyways, he changed his suit.”

Tony frowned. “That’s odd. If he had a new suit, Karen wouldn’t have been able to have access to his tracker and his vitals. But she does; I have them here.” He held up the tablet. It was still open to Peter’s app.

May shook her head. “Trust me; it’s new. Look.” She held up her phone, which was pulled open to the latest post on the Spidey\_Watch twitter account. On it was a video of Peter, swinging down the street. Sure enough, Peter was wearing a new suit. It was all black, with a large, white spider on its front. On the back was another white spider, this one smaller than the one on the front. But, in the video, Peter still had his mask. Which was weird, because Karen had said that he wasn’t wearing the mask.

Tony’s frown deepened. He tried to connect the dots, but the story still eluded his grasp. Then, it

hit him. "He painted the suit. It's still the same suit, he just changed the colors. And he made himself a new mask."

"Are you sure? Everything looks brand-new, not just the mask."

"I'm sure. Look, the two spider emblems are still in the spot; still the same size. The suit itself looks identical. The only difference is that the spiders are white and the rest of the suit is black. But the mask...the mask looks extremely different. Look at the eyes; they're larger. And the mask is much, much more snug. Before, I could barely tell where his nose, mouth, and ears were. Now, it's easy to see. Look," he said, pointing at the video. "I can easily tell that he's smiling right now. And, the new mask idea is supported by the fact that Karen said that he's not wearing his mask. He's wearing a mask, just not the mask I made for him."

May frowned. "But when did he do this? Why would he do it? It doesn't make sense, Tony."

Tony thought back to Peter's behavior during the weekend visit. He had already guessed that Peter was working on a project that he was hiding from Tony. But it seemed that it was far from the surprise Tony had thought it was. It seemed that the secret project was an upgrade on the suit. But he only had about half an hour to work in secret. And Tony knew that Peter didn't sneak into the lab; it was locked the entire time. Or was it? Had Peter snuck in later that night to finish work on the mask? Before, Tony would have doubted that Peter would ever go behind his back to work on a project in secret, but now...he wouldn't put it past the new Peter who skipped school to be Spider-Man. "I guess he worked on the suit while he was up at my house last week. As to why he did it...your guess is as good as mine."

May frowned. "I know he's been acting weird lately, but I didn't think anything was off as him skipping school for patrol."

"Weird how?" Tony asked, trying to see if May had picked up on the same things he and Pepper had.

May sighed. "He's been staying out on patrol later and later. He's coming home seconds before his curfew ends and I've noticed that he has many NHIs on homework assignments. He even got a 60 on his AP Chemistry test yesterday. He hasn't been talking to anyone; me, Happy, Ned, MJ, no one. It's beginning to worry me, Tony."

And it was beginning to worry Tony as well. Peter wasn't doing his homework; wasn't performing well in his favorite subject; wasn't talking. Those three things were things that should not be associated with Peter; a sure sign that something was definitely wrong. "He's worrying me, too, May."

At that moment, Karen chimed in. "*Peter has been stopped for ten minutes. I believe that he has stopped for lunch. Now would be the perfect time to confront him.*"

Tony looked at May. "I have--"

He was interrupted by a chime on May's phone. They both looked at it and saw a new post on the Spidey\_Watch twitter account. It was a picture of Peter standing in line for a hot dog next to Mysterio. Tony felt his blood chill as he realized that Peter had lied to him. Peter was still hanging out with Mysterio and, even worse, was doing so at the expense of school. The caption read *Just spotted Spider-Man buying lunch with the up-and-coming hero, Mysterio!* The time of the post was a little over ten minutes ago, coinciding with Karen's guess as to it being Peter's lunchtime.

May's face wrinkled in confusion. "Isn't that the new hero that appeared a couple of weeks ago?"

“Yes. Peter’s been spotted with him a couple of times, but I told him to stay away from Mysterio. He rubs me the wrong way.”

“Well, if he’s supporting this little stunt of playing hooky, he rubs me the wrong way, too.”

“I’ll be back soon, May. I’m going to go have a talk with Peter.”

“Good. Bring him back here once you finish your talk. I want to have a talk with him, too.”

“Will do.” Tony tapped the nanotech housing unit on his chest. They spread across his body, forming an Iron Man suit around him.

“Tony...” May said in a warning tone. “You know what the doctor said.”

“May, I know. But this situation seems to call for a bit more manpower. They’re probably on a rooftop somewhere; I’ll need the suit to fly.”

May sighed, looking away. Tony knew that him using the suit was far from what she wanted. But, if she wanted him to get Peter, he had to. After several seconds, she turned back to him and said, “Be careful.”

“I always am,” Tony said, grinning at her. His grin faded as he handed the tablet to May. “Here, you can watch his vitals and location while I’m gone. After all this is done, I’ll give you a tablet that can communicate with Karen. That way, you can track him yourself without having to call me. We should’ve done this years ago.”

May shook her head. “There was no need to when you were just a few minutes away and able to use the suit.”

Tony frowned. May’s comments were similar to what Peter had said during their argument Saturday night. Her comments reminded him of something that he had forgotten to tell her. “Remind me to schedule a meeting between me, you, Happy, and Peter. We need to talk about some new adjustments that are needed to keep Peter safe.”

May nodded. “Good idea. I’ll put it in my reminders. Now go. He won’t be eating lunch forever.”

Tony nodded, then headed out through the front door. He ignored the weird looks he got and the curious faces watching him as he made his way outside. Once he was outside, he asked Karen for Peter’s location. Karen was connected with his suit so he could see Peter’s information while in the middle of a fight. It made it easy to know if something was wrong in situations where Peter wasn’t communicating clearly or outside of his view--as he was now. Once he received Peter’s location, he used FRIDAY to plot a course towards the secluded rooftop Peter was on.

...

Tony arrived at the rooftop minutes after leaving May’s. It was ten stories above the ground and had a railing around the roof, which was designed to prevent people from falling off of the roof. Once he got there, he found Mysterio and Peter sitting in the middle of the roof, digging into the hot dogs that they had bought at the hot dog stand shown in the Spidey\_Watch post. Nothing about it was odd, apart from the fact that the kid had been hanging out with the one person Tony had told him to stay away from.

“Hey, Spidey,” he said, once he landed.

Peter turned around, his eyes widening and his mouth open in shock at Tony’s appearance. And

that was when Tony noticed that the kid's mask was off. Not just partially in order for him to eat lunch, but entirely off. Tony glanced at Mysterio and found that his helmet was off and sitting beside him on the ground. Tony's heart stopped. The number one reason why he had told Peter to stay away from Mysterio was because Mysterio could discover who he was. Now, the kid had gone above and beyond simple disobedience. He was blatantly ignoring safety, revealing his identity to the new hero, a new hero Tony had never heard of before.

"Mr. Stark?" Peter asked, standing up.

"Yeah, kid," Tony said, tapping the nanotech housing unit. The nanite suit disappeared, leaving him in his normal street clothes. He didn't say Peter's actual name, since he wasn't sure if Peter had told Mysterio what it was. Maybe he had just done a face reveal with the hero, not exchanged names. At least, that's what Tony was hoping for. "What the hell is going on here?"

"Umm," Peter said, still looking like a deer in headlights. That assured Tony that the kid knew what he was doing was wrong.

"And why are you with *him*?" Tony asked, glaring at Mysterio. It was the first time he got a good look at the hero and he had to take a step backwards in shock. Mysterio looked familiar to him, but where he had seen the hero before escaped him. However, when he took a closer look, he could honestly say that the hero looked a little like him. Mysterio had his hair styled similarly to Tony and he had facial hair as well. Maybe that was why he looked so familiar; he had seen the hero whenever he peered into a mirror.

"Peter shared your worries about me," Mysterio said, standing up. "I assured him, as I am--"

"Hold up, *Peter*?" Tony said, interrupting the hero. He quickly looked back at Peter, who was still frozen in shock. "Kid, you told him your name?" Peter's only saving grace in this situation was that Tony was banking on the fact that Peter hadn't told the hero his name. But, it seemed that he was wrong. Peter was definitely in some deep trouble.

Peter's shock dissipated as he looked at Tony. He clenched his hands, clearly gearing up to argue with Tony. Tony let him do so, also readying himself to argue with the kid. "So what if I told him my name?" Peter asked. "It's my name; I can tell anyone I please."

"Peter," Tony said. If the cat was out of the bag, he might as well use Peter's name. "I understand that, but you disobeyed me. I told you to stay away from Mysterio; I told you that it was--"

"And I told you that I could trust Mr. Beck!" Peter yelled. The name rang a bell in Tony's head, but he pushed it away, intent on the argument at hand. "But you didn't listen to me!"

"Kid, you didn't listen to me! Hell, you *lied* to me!" Peter looked away, telling Tony that Peter felt bad for lying to him. It did make him feel better that Peter knew what he was doing was wrong, but he still had other things he had to tell him. "You told me that you would stay away from Mysterio, yet here you are, with your mask off around the person you said you would stay away from."

Mysterio stepped forward, trying to stop the argument. "If I may--"

"And *you*," Tony said, rounding on the hero. "Stay the hell away from my kid."

"You're being ridiculous, Tony," Peter said, rolling his eyes.

"Oh, we're using Tony now, is that right?" Tony asked, his focus swiveling back on the kid. He ignored Mysterio for the moment, focused solely on Peter. "Well, *Parker*, let me tell you how ridiculous you're being. You skipped school today, did you know that? The school called May

telling her about your absence, so she called me. We then, both of us, attempted to call and text you, but you didn't answer. I contacted Karen, who stated that your suit was on, but your mask was off. Do you realize how worrying that was? I got a missing spider-kid, in the suit, without a mask, not answering his phone. I started to think that you were kidnapped while on patrol last night and your identity was revealed. May was thinking the same thing. Instead, I discovered that you ditched school to go on patrol. Not only that, but you ditched school to hang out with him, *without a mask*. So don't you dare tell me that I'm the one being ridiculous."

Peter huffed. "You are being ridiculous!" he shouted. "I told you that Mr. Beck was fine; that we could trust him. Instead, you ignored me and forced me to stop hanging out with him, for no reason!"

"No reason?" Tony repeated. "Pete, I told you why! I told you that we had no idea what his ulterior motive was in befriending you or who he was! Two solid reasons as to why you needed to stay away from him!"

"I'm standing right here," Mysterio said. "My name's Beck and there is no secret reason as to why I'm hanging out with Peter. He's a good kid and I like him. Because of that, I want to patrol with him, just to make sure he's safe."

"See?" Peter asked, gesturing to Mysterio. "I said that there's no issue with me being friends with Mr. Beck! Everything's fine and--"

"Peter, everything is not fine!" Tony shouted. "You skipped school for God's sake! May told me that you've not been doing your homework and that you failed a chemistry test yesterday!"

That shut Peter up. Confusion filled his face as he asked, "She told you that? Why?"

"News flash, kid: We care about you."

Peter's face quickly flashed with an emotion that Tony didn't have time to place before it went back to being filled with anger. "Really? You're going to say that after everything that has happened? After everything I've been dealing with for the past three weeks?"

Tony stared at Peter in confusion. What was Peter talking about? "Kid, I don't understand. What are--"

"You don't understand?" Peter asked. "If you don't understand, then maybe you don't really care."

"Peter, tell me," Tony said. "Please, kid, I want to understand. Really, I do."

"Look around!" Peter said, throwing his hands wide. "Look at how much everything has changed! Did you really think that those changes wouldn't have affected me?"

"Kid, nothing has changed. I'm still here; May's still here."

"Still here?" Peter echoed, his voice incredulous. "Are you really still here after marrying Mrs. Stark and having Morgan? Is May really still here after marrying Happy and getting her new job? No, you two aren't still here and you're never coming back. Maybe I should've never returned. It doesn't seem to matter to you, so it would make no difference if I'm here or not."

Tony felt the blood drain from his face. He remembered those five years without Peter vividly and the grief he had felt after losing the kid who was like a son to him. If Peter was saying that he shouldn't have returned, was he implying that he wanted to stay dead? And it was that thought that scared Tony to his core.

Peter looked searchingly at Tony, but Tony couldn't understand what he was thinking behind the figurative mask he wore. Was he seeing Tony's reaction and realizing that Tony did care deeply for him? Or was he thinking that it was all an act? Tony desperately hoped that Peter knew that it was the former.

"Kid--" Tony started to say.

"Leave me alone," Peter interrupted. He turned around, walking away from Tony.

"Kid!" Tony called after him. But Peter didn't listen to him. He continued to walk away, approaching the edge of the roof. With Peter's last words, Tony felt his heart rate increase as Peter walked away. He ran up to the kid, grabbing his shoulder.

"Peter, stop!" he yelled.

Peter knocked Tony's hand off of him, which caused him to face Tony again. "Let go of me!" he shouted. He started to turn back around, but Tony grabbed his arm.

"Pe--" he started to say, but quickly stopped as Peter whirled around.

"I said, get off of me!" Peter yelled. He brought his hand up, which was closed in a fist. Tony watched, frozen in shock, as Peter stopped his fist mere inches away from Tony's face.

Tony--who wasn't breathing--and Peter--who was breathing hard--stood frozen in shock. Peter's hand was still inches away from Tony's face and his hand was trembling. In Tony's mind, all he could see was Peter almost punching him in the face. It seemed that image was the only image running in Peter's mind as well, since Peter was staring at Tony with wide-eyes. After several seconds--seconds that felt like a lifetime for Tony--Peter lowered his hand. He stared down at it, seemingly perplexed at what it had almost done.

Peter backed away and, this time, Tony let him go. As Peter jumped off of the edge of the building, a mask wrapped around his head--reminding Tony of the nanites from the Iron Spider. Mysterio put his helmet on and flew off, sneaking a glance at Tony before following Peter. Tony stayed still, staring at the spot Peter had been in only moments before. Only then did he realize that, after almost hitting him, Peter's suit had changed back to red and blue. When his mask appeared, though, his suit changed to black.

What was going on? How had Peter's suit changed colors? Why did it change colors? Why did Peter try to hit him? Peter was never a physical person; he was usually good at solving his problems through conversation, not violence. What did Peter mean when he said that Tony wasn't there for him? What did he mean by the fact that everything had changed? In Tony's mind, the only thing that had changed recently was the fact that Peter was alive, something that Tony got great joy from. And why did Mysterio look so familiar? Mysterio seemed to have the kid's trust now--which Tony could easily see by his insistence that Mysterio could be trusted--and was most likely the root for Peter's abrupt personality change. After all, Tony had begun to spot changes in Peter's behavior when Mysterio had appeared in Peter's life. As such, Tony aimed to learn all he could about the man, and use that information to solve what was happening with Peter.

A decision made, Tony tapped his suit's housing unit. After it had formed around him, Tony flew away, heading towards the Tower. It still belonged to SI and many meetings were still held there. In fact, Pepper had to go into the city the first of every month to prepare for that month's projects. The Penthouse floors were still technically his; the furniture should still be there, collecting dust. FRIDAY was also still hooked up to the Tower. With her help, Tony should easily figure out all there was to find out about the new hero that held Peter's admiration: Mysterio.

## Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked this week's chapter! Stay tuned for next week!

Notice: No update Wednesday, Oct. 20



# Chapter Eleven

## Chapter Notes

Good morning, everyone. I apologize for not updating last week--life has been insane for me in the last couple of weeks. I hope everyone enjoys this week's chapter; longest one so far!

TW: Four major character deaths. Three of them aren't real, but they are presented as truth (it'll make sense once you read the story), but one of them actually does happen and is canon.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## Part Three

*And if she had the proper words to say, she would tell him*

*Tuesday, September 19, 2023*

Peter felt his mask wrap around him as he leaped off of the building. Too many emotions were flooding through him; too numerous and too quick for him to place. His thoughts were also moving too rapidly for him to get a good read on what he was thinking. One thing that his thoughts and emotions kept circling back to, however, was the fact that he had almost hit Mr. Stark, his mentor.

Never had he ever acted so physically violent before. Well, discounting Spider-Man stuff. But even then, he never initiated the violence; he only used violence to stop crimes. But, for some reason that he couldn't answer, he had almost punched Mr. Stark, seemingly unprovoked.

***Unprovoked?*** the symbiote asked, speaking inside of his head. For the past week, the symbiote had been speaking in his mind, saying thoughts that Peter was too scared to put into words himself and encouraging actions that Peter had never even considered doing. For example, almost hitting Mr. Stark. ***That's what you're believing? You know that he deserved it.***

*No, he didn't!* Peter mentally shouted back.

***Oh, please,*** the symbiote responded. ***He never cared about you. He told you lie after lie. He used Spider-Man as a publicity stunt. He never really cared about you. He only pretended to care. Doesn't a person that lied to you; that used you; that played with your emotions deserve to die? And if that's true, what's wrong with a simple punch to the face?***

"You're wrong!" Peter shouted out loud. He landed on a rooftop and started to pull at the black suit, trying to get rid of the symbiote. However, it merely laughed at Peter's antics.

***You really think that you could get rid of us that easily?*** it asked, sounding amused.

Peter's attempts to get the symbiote off of him suddenly ceased. He tried to move his arms, hands, head, anything--but found that he couldn't. The only thing that he could move was his mouth, which he found out as he let out a scream of frustration.

The symbiote chuckled at Peter's scream. The mask around Peter's face melted away, something that confused him. What was the symbiote planning? Why would it remove his mask?

*We've seen your deepest fears, Peter*, the symbiote said, no doubt hearing Peter's confused thoughts running through his mind. *We know how much your secret identity means to you*. Peter started to move by himself, still without any control over his own body. His heart began to beat faster as he realized that the symbiote was the one controlling his body. He had no idea what the symbiote would do with that control, but just the simple knowledge that he couldn't move was enough for him to be scared to death. The symbiote forced him to stand on the edge of the roof, making him look out upon the city. The view would've been gorgeous, but all Peter noticed was his rapid heartbeat, sounding as if it was trying to get out of his chest.

*What would happen if we make you go on patrol, without your mask?* the voice asked. Peter's fear increased, as it sounded like the symbiote was actually debating revealing Peter's identity. *Would your friends notice? Would New York figure out your alter-ego? And what about the people you put in jail? Like Vulture? Or Scorpion? When they find out that sixteen-year-old Peter Parker was the one who put them behind bars, what do you think would happen? What would happen to your precious Aunt May? Or your best friend Ned? Or your crush, MJ? Will your enemies go after them? Will they die because we revealed your identity?*

Peter's heart dropped. "No. You wouldn't do that."

Even though he couldn't see the symbiote, Peter felt it shrug. *It would be so simple*, it replied. *Just a quick swing down the road or perhaps posting a picture of you in the suit on your twitter account. There's a Spidey\_Watch account, is there not? Maybe we'll post the picture there. Who knows?* It began to laugh, which caused shivers up and down Peter's spine.

Peter felt an increase to his already high heart rate. His biggest worry about being Spider-Man was never about him dying while on patrol or getting hurt. No, his biggest worry was always about his identity being revealed. And not for what it would mean for himself. Namely, he was fearful of what it would mean for his loved ones. What it would mean for May. For Ned. For MJ.

"No," Peter pleaded. "Please, no. I can't let you do that. Please, sir, don't do that." He knew that he was begging, but he didn't care. Peter would do anything to keep the world from knowing who he was.

The symbiote laughed again. *Anything, did you say? You would do anything?*

If Peter could move his eyes, he would've widened them so wide. He would've also shook his head, but the symbiote still had control over his body. He had no idea what the symbiote was getting at with its question, but he knew that it wouldn't be good.

*If you would do any--* Before the symbiote could finish his sentence, it started screeching. Peter screamed in pain as it screeched. His head felt like it was splitting in two and he fell to his knees from the sheer agony of it. Dimly, he realized that he had control over his body again, but he couldn't do anything because of the symbiote's unearthly sounds. Peter had no idea how long he stayed like that--laid on the ground with his hands holding his head--but it felt like hours.

"--ter?" he heard someone say. "Kid, can you hear me?"

He groaned. The voice sounded like it was underwater; hard to hear and hard to decipher. After a few minutes, Peter could hear better and he slowly sat up, hands still holding his head. Peter tasted something bitter in his mouth, but what it was, he had no idea.

“Are you okay?” the voice asked, seemingly shouting.

Peter opened his eyes to look up to see who the voice belonged to. He saw Mr. Beck, but he quickly shut his eyes again. Everything was too bright and it was nearly impossible to see through that brightness.

Mr. Beck shook him, causing Peter’s headache to increase. “Pete, you’re freaking me out. Answer me!”

Peter winced at the loudness of Mr. Beck’s voice. “You’re too loud,” he tried to say, but, due to his heavy slurring, it all jumbled into one big word.

Mr. Beck seemed to understand what Peter was trying to say because his next words were considerably quieter. “Is this better?”

Peter nodded. “Much. Thanks.”

“What happened, kid? All I heard was screaming.”

“Something went wrong with the symbiote,” Peter answered. “It started screeching, inside my head. Its screeching must have messed with my senses and caused a sensory overload, because everything is just too much right now.”

“Do you get sensory overloads a lot?”

Peter nodded. “Yeah, but not so much lately. They usually happened when I first got my powers.”

“Jeez, kid, I’m sorry,” Mr. Beck said. “I feel like I’m the one that caused it.”

Peter’s face wrinkled in confusion. “What do you mean? How did you cause it?”

“My mist,” he answered. Peter opened his eyes slowly and realized that the hero’s green mist was surrounding him. Upon realizing that the brightness had dimmed enough for him to keep his eyes open, he looked up at Mr. Beck. The hero had his helmet on, making it hard to see him. “I saw that you were having issues with the symbiote, so I targeted it with my mist.”

Peter frowned. “So your mist caused it to react that way?”

Mr. Beck nodded. “The chemical makeup of the mist contains something that the symbiote doesn’t like.”

Peter thought that there was something wrong with Mr. Beck’s explanation, but he couldn’t figure out why. While he tried to think of what was wrong, his headache worsened. He shrugged his confusion away, deciding that it wasn’t worth getting a migraine for. “It’s fine, Mr. Beck. As long as you stopped the symbiote.”

“Do you not like the symbiote?” Mr. Beck asked. While Peter couldn’t see the hero’s facial expression--since he still had the helmet on--he imagined that Mr. Beck looked hurt.

“No, not really,” Peter said honestly. He thought back on its reasoning as to why it was okay for Peter to hit Mr. Stark. He thought about how scary it was when he had found that he couldn’t move; that the symbiote was controlling him. He looked away from Mr. Beck, instead staring at the ground. “I don’t think that the symbiote is a good idea anymore.”

“Maybe that’s because you haven’t given it control,” Mr. Beck replied.

Peter's head snapped up to look at Mr. Beck in shock. "Given it control? What, so it is a parasite? You want me to let it rule my life? Control what I say and do?"

"It's not a parasite," Mr. Beck reassured, though his words didn't alleviate Peter's concerns at all. In his mind, the symbiote was definitely proving itself to be a parasite, since Peter's personality had changed for the worse thanks to its "help." Not to mention, the symbiote had started controlling his body mere minutes ago, an action that Peter definitely thought proved that it was a parasite. Mr. Beck continued talking. "It is designed to help you be Spider-Man. If it's helping, what does it matter that you're letting it control you?"

To Peter, it mattered a whole lot. "Because I almost hurt Mr. Stark! Because it just almost revealed my identity!"

"And why do you think the symbiote did that?"

Peter looked at Mr. Beck in confusion. How was he supposed to know why it did what it did? "Because it is actually a parasite?"

"Peter, for the last time, it is not a damn parasite!" Mr. Beck yelled. Peter flinched, not expecting Mr. Beck to yell at him. He had only known the hero for two weeks, but never had he ever yelled at Peter before. His ears were still sensitive after the symbiote's screeching and Mr. Beck's yelling wasn't helping matters. Mr. Beck must've noticed Peter's reaction, because his next words were much quieter and softer. "I'm sorry," Mr. Beck apologized. "Just, it's not a parasite. Stop saying that it is."

Again, something struck Peter as wrong, but he still couldn't place it. The harder he tried to, the more elusive that something grew.

"Going back to my last question," Mr. Beck continued talking. "It did that because you didn't trust it. You didn't trust it enough to let it do what it wanted."

"What it wanted?" Peter stood up shakily, still not quite in control of himself after the symbiote's attack. "What it wanted was to hurt Mr. Stark!"

Peter's eyes widened as he heard the symbiote in his head start laughing. Mr. Beck took a step forward, seeming to sense that something was wrong.

"Kid?" he asked. "What is..."

Mr. Beck continued talking, but Peter tuned him out. Instead, he focused on what the symbiote was saying.

***Are you still going on about that, Peter? We've already explained why it's okay for your 'Mr. Stark'--it chuckled mockingly when it said "Mr. Stark"--to get hurt. But, if you insist on another explanation...***

Everything turned black. Peter blinked a few times, thinking that something was wrong with his eyesight. Seconds before, the sun was shining high in the sky, but, now, it was pitch black. It was so dark that Peter couldn't tell if his eyes were closed or open.

***All the people in your life don't care about you. So why should you care about them?***

"That's not true!" Peter shouted.

"Peter?" Mr. Beck said. Peter spun around, thinking that he wasn't alone in the darkness. But,

nobody was there.

“Mr. Beck?” Peter asked.

But only the wind answered Peter. It rippled around him, catching his hair and blowing it around.

***See? Even Mr. Beck has left you in your darkest hour. And he's not the only one.***

Suddenly, a deep red light flared up. Its appearance helped to ground Peter and he ran towards it. It acted like a beacon in the darkness, an anchor in the storm of chaos. He quickly stopped, though, when he saw what it was lighting up. He stumbled away.

Uncle Ben laid on the ground, hands over his stomach. Blood was seeping through his fingers and he looked up when Peter appeared.

“This isn’t real...” Peter mumbled. “This can’t be happening right now.”

***Are you sure?*** the symbiote asked. ***Often, the line between reality and unreality blurs. Who can really say what is real and what is not, especially when memories are involved?***

“Peter,” Uncle Ben gasped out.

And just like that, Peter was fourteen-years-old again, watching as his uncle bled out in front of him. All thoughts that this wasn’t real flew out of Peter’s head as he crouched down next to his dying uncle. “U-uncle Ben?” Peter asked, his hands hesitantly reaching out towards Uncle Ben.

Suddenly, Uncle Ben’s face contorted in anger. “It’s your fault, Peter.”

Peter’s hands froze. He looked at Uncle Ben in shock. “W-what?”

“It’s your fault. I died because of you.” Wind rippled by Peter, swirling the scene in front of him. Uncle Ben appeared again, this one without blood dripping from the gunshot wound in his side. “I was the one who raised you, Pete.” An image of another Uncle Ben, this one with a younger Peter, appeared near them. The new Uncle Ben was bent down, tying the young Peter’s shoe. “I was the one who taught you how to tie your shoes. I was the one who taught you valuable life lessons. And you killed me.” He enunciated each word with vengeance, like he really, truly blamed Peter for his death. And what killed Peter even more was that he couldn’t tell Uncle Ben that he was wrong. It was his fault and he was the one that killed his uncle.

The wind picked up again, the two Uncle Bens and young Peter swirling away with it and the dying Uncle Ben on the ground appeared again. “You could’ve prevented this. You had your powers; you saw the criminal in action just seconds before he killed me. You could’ve stopped him. You should’ve stopped him. But you didn’t.”

Peter felt tears pouring down his face. He knew that Uncle Ben was right; everything his uncle was saying was the truth and what Peter had thought for years now.

“You had a responsibility; a responsibility to stop criminals with the powers you were gifted. But you did nothing. Remember, Peter,” Uncle Ben said. The second Uncle Ben appeared and, together, the two Uncle Bens said, “With great power comes great responsibility.” The second Uncle Ben vanished, leaving the first one to talk with Peter.

Uncle Ben continued to talk, his voice growing weaker and weaker. “If you have the power to do something, but you don’t...and then the bad things happen, they happen because of you.” With that, Uncle Ben’s breathing stopped. Peter gasped as he heard his uncle’s heart stop.

Peter started to sob. It was his fault. It was all his fault.

***Your uncle left you, too. Left you to deal with the guilt his death caused you. And you want to know the saddest part?***

Uncle Ben's body and the red light disappeared, leaving Peter in the dark. Peter wiped his face and scrambled up, preparing for whatever happened next.

***You killed him***, the symbiote said. ***Just like you kill everyone you claim to love.*** The symbiote chuckled. ***You almost killed your mentor; the same mentor who you are trying to protect right now.***

Another red light appeared, that same shade as the previous one. This time, Peter was hesitant to follow it. The last light had shown Peter one of his darkest memories; which dark memory was the light trying to light up now?

***We can sense your apprehension, Peter***, the voice inside of his head said. ***But why are you so afraid? Haven't you already lived through this memory once before?*** Suddenly, the wind appeared again, pushing Peter towards the red light. He tried to push against it, but found that he wasn't strong enough to hold his ground against its relentless pushing. Slowly but surely, Peter was making his way towards the light, whether he liked it or not.

Once he got there and saw the memory in front of him, his heart dropped. It was one of the scenes that fueled his nightmares ever since he came back from the dead. Mr. Stark was sitting on the ground in front of him, staring unseeingly in front of him. It was the same image Peter had seared in his brain ever since the Compound Battle.

"Mr. Stark?" Peter said hesitantly. He was fearful to hear how Mr. Stark would answer him. Was he going to blame him like Uncle Ben had?

When Peter spoke, Mr. Stark blinked then looked at Peter.

"Mr. Stark?" Peter asked again, bending down to see the man. "Are you okay, sir?"

Instantly, Mr. Stark's face became angry; so angry that Peter stumbled back. "Why do you care?" Mr. Stark asked, venom laced in his voice. "You're the one that caused this. You're the one who made me Snap."

"N-no, I didn't," Peter said, not understanding where Mr. Stark was getting his logic from. "You Snapped to save the universe; I didn't make you do anything."

Mr. Stark laughed, but it was one that was hollow. "Keep telling that to yourself, kid. But, at the end of the day, it was always your fault. Why do you think I did what I did?"

Peter blinked in confusion. "Did the Snap? I already said why; you did--"

"Not the Snap, Peter," Mr. Stark interrupted. "Why do you think I solved time travel?"

Peter had heard vaguely about how the un-Vanished Avengers had undone the Snap. Using time travel, they had traveled to various points in time, collecting the six Infinity Stones. Once they collected them all, Hulk had Snapped, which brought the Vanished back. Later, they had to return the stones back to their respective timelines, which was when Mr. Rogers returned to 1945. Peter didn't know who exactly figured out time travel or why, but it seemed that it had something to do with Mr. Stark.

"I did it for you, kid," Mr. Stark answered. "You died, Peter, and I felt like a part of myself had died alongside you. When Cap came to me with his time heist idea, I didn't want to do it at first. I didn't want to have hope that I could bring you back. But then I remembered you. I remembered everything you fought for; all of your ideals. And that's when I realized that I had to do it. I had to bring you back. I had the opportunity to do so, and, if I didn't....So, I solved time travel. I brought you back, kid.

"And now I'm sitting here, dying because I decided to save you. I decided to sacrifice myself for the sake that you could be saved. To create a world in which Peter Parker was alive. I'm dying because of *you*." He jabbed a finger at Peter, enunciating the "you." Mr. Stark began to cough. Peter watched, frozen in fear, as he saw blood tainting Mr. Stark's lips.

"Mr. Stark," Peter said. "I-I didn't mean--"

"Who cares what you intended, Peter?" Mr. Stark snapped. He coughed again. "All that matters is that my death is on *you*."

Peter's spidey-sense went off, alerting him to a danger that was behind him. He spun around, preparing for an attack, then quickly lowered his guard as he saw that it was another Mr. Stark. This one was in a black suit, the same one he wore under his Iron Man suit during the ferry fiasco.

"And if I died," the new Mr. Stark said. "I feel like that's on you." He disappeared as quickly as he had appeared, leaving the dying Mr. Stark with Peter. His words were similar to the words the billionaire had told him after the ferry incident and, as with Uncle Ben's words, were undoubtedly the truth.

Mr. Stark started coughing again, causing Peter to face him again. Peter, for the second time in his life, heard a sound and saw a sight that he would never forget. It was the sound of Tony's heart stopping, never to be heard again; and the sight of his arc reactor going out, never to be lit again. Every single emotion he felt the first time this moment happened returned tenfold--his grief was stronger, his helplessness was stronger, his shock was stronger--yet a new emotion had joined in with the emotional storm: Guilt.

Because if Mr. Stark had done it all for him; if Mr. Stark had invented time travel for him; if he had Snapped to ensure that Peter was alive; then it was all Peter's fault. Peter had almost killed Mr. Stark.

***You see, Peter?*** the symbiote asked. The wind picked up again as Mr. Stark and the light disappeared, leaving Peter in the dark once again. ***You killed your uncle. You almost killed Mr. Stark. It was, and always will be, your fault. And everything bad that happens is your fault, too. But you already know that, don't you?***

And the symbiote was right: everything bad in the world was always Peter's fault. After all, that was the definition of Parker Luck. His parents had died when he was five; his uncle had died when he was fourteen; Mr. Stark had almost died just three weeks ago. Who goes through three father figures in the span of only sixteen years? The only common denominator was Peter himself. It had something to do with him; it was always his fault.

Even his death on Titan could be classified as his fault. He had been the one who was supposed to take the gauntlet off of Thanos' hand in the rushed plan that they had created on Titan, but he hadn't. Thanos had kept the gauntlet, enabling him to Snap and kill half of the world. Maybe if he had followed Mr. Stark's instructions in the first place; if he had gone home when the billionaire had told him; if he had stayed on the school bus heading to MoMA and not left to go fight aliens;

then maybe something else would have happened. Maybe, without the common denominator of Peter, the Avengers would've won.

The symbiote chuckled. *As we expected, you do know. Since you understand, then you realize that you will kill every person that you love. Not only your uncle and your mentor, but--*

Its words were cut off by the sound of roaring water. Confused, Peter looked around, but, due to the inky blackness around him, he couldn't see anything. Suddenly, he was swept away by a wall of water. He spluttered, his head ducking under the wave; for that was what it was: A tidal wave had appeared out of nowhere and had swept him in its overwhelming waters. His mind jumped back to when Vulture had dropped him in a lake.

*He was falling, hundreds of feet into the air. He had felt the parachute deploy when Vulture was holding him, something that, initially, he was grateful for. Now, his fear increased as he became entangled with the material, the parachute forming a cocoon around him.*

*Suddenly, Peter hit the water. He plummeted towards the bottom, becoming more wrapped up in the parachute with each second. The water was freezing and he felt its coldness seeping into him. Dimly, he remembered that, thanks to that stupid radioactive spider, his body couldn't thermoregulate. His lungs began to burn from the lack of oxygen and were screaming at him to breathe. Each second that passed was another second of no oxygen. Each second that passed was another second he spent in freezing cold temperatures. Each second that passed, the more wrapped up he became in the parachute.*

Oh God, Peter thought. He was going to die here. He was going to die right here, in this lake.

Peter snapped back to reality. Oh God, Peter thought. He was going to die here. He was going to die right here, in this tidal wave.

As suddenly as it had appeared, it quickly disappeared. Peter found himself surrounded by the same dark red light that had been prevalent in every image that the symbiote had shown him. He was kneeling on the ground, soaking wet and chilled to the bone. He coughed, spitting out water. His mind felt like it was breaking. First, he had witnessed the death of Uncle Ben--one of the biggest traumatic experiences in his young life. Then, he had watched as Mr. Stark's heart had stopped beating and his arc reactor had gone out again--another horrific memory in Peter's long-term memory bank. Now, he was being attacked by unseen tidal waves. What was coming next? And it couldn't be real, could it? Peter couldn't be swept away by a wave; not in the middle of New York. None of this was real. It was impossible.

But it was happening. Peter was currently experiencing the impossible, meaning that it had to be real. It was as real as the truths that the symbiote was saying and the visions of Uncle Ben and Mr. Stark.

"Peter?" someone asked. The voice sounded feminine, which confused Peter. He looked up to find May was standing in front of him.

"May?" he asked. "What are you doing here?"

Tears filled her eyes. "I'm sorry, Peter. I'm so sorry, honey."

Peter's fear spiked with May's words. "May, what's going on? What are you sorry for?"

"They found me. They found out who you were and they came after me. Peter, I--" Her words were interrupted by her scream of pain as, out of nowhere, she was stabbed from behind by a spear.



“MAY!” Peter screamed. He scrambled up, running towards his aunt. She was the only family he had left; he couldn’t lose her, too.

“Peter...” May said, her voice soft and weak. Peter’s eyes widened as the spear exited, leaving her with no support. She screamed again as it was pulled out, but this scream was weaker than her first.

“May?” Peter asked, reaching out to catch her as she collapsed. He ignored the growing pool of blood below her, ignored the blood that was staining his hands, adding to the blood of Uncle Ben. “May, can you hear me?” he asked as he held his dying aunt. No, not dying, because there was absolutely no way one of his parent figures was leaving him again.

“Peter...” she said again, her unfocused eyes staring at him. She weakly held his arm with a shaking hand. “Peter, honey, I love you...” Her voice trailed into nothingness, her eyes glistened over, and her hand dropped.

“May!” he screamed again. Tears began welling up his eyes. “No,” he whispered. “This can’t be happening. Not again.” He shook May lightly, but May refused to wake up. “May,” he said brokenly. “May, please. Please, come back to me.”

***She’s not coming back, Peter,*** the symbiote said, sounding gleeful.

And as Peter looked at her dead body, he found himself believing it. He stood up, his hands clenched into fists. He looked around, searching for who had killed his aunt. But he couldn’t see anyone. There was only the blackness surrounding him and the red light shining from an unknown source. “Come out!” he shouted at the blackness. Rage was consuming him; the same rage that had consumed him when his uncle had died. A part of him was scared at what he would do if he found his aunt’s killer, but he didn’t listen to it, focused solely on the anger roaring inside of him.

The symbiote chuckled. ***You won’t be able to find your aunt’s murderer that way.***

Peter whirled around, trying to find where the symbiote’s voice was coming from. But it was inside his head; he wasn’t able to find it. “Who attacked her? Who was the one that...” Peter was unable to finish his sentence, but it seemed that the symbiote understood what he was going to say.

***You know the murderer intimately. In fact, we think that you already answered your own question.***

“No,” he said, stumbling back. The symbiote was right; Peter knew the answer, but he refused to believe it.

***Oh, yes, Peter,*** the symbiote said. ***You killed your aunt.***

Peter fell to the ground. Tears were falling down his face; tears that he couldn’t stop.

***You were the one that decided to be Spider-Man. You were the one that arrested the city’s villains. And someone discovered your identity. And in finding out your identity, they discovered your aunt. They sought revenge against you and they killed her. And you didn’t protect her. You didn’t stop it; you couldn’t stop it. Her death is on your hands.***

Peter knew that it was true. It was as true as the inky blackness surrounding him. Peter had killed Uncle Ben, so logic stated that he would be the cause of his aunt’s death as well.

***You will end up killing everyone in your life, including your crush MJ.***

Wind rushed by Peter, drying the tears on his face. He looked up as May's body disappeared and MJ appeared. She was standing, her brown curls blowing through the wind. She looked at Peter, her face filled with an expression Peter had never seen before: Terror. And not just simple terror; no, it was pure, unadulterated terror.

"MJ?" Peter asked, scared and wary to see what would happen next. He stood up slowly, but stayed back.

"Pe--" MJ started to say, but the wind picked her words up and tossed them away. The wind speed increased, making it almost impossible to not fall over from its power. Peter stumbled, but found his balance. MJ stumbled from the force of the wind as well, but she wasn't as lucky as he was. She started falling backwards.

Suddenly, the red light brightened, shining on a larger area. Peter's eyes widened as he realized that she was on the edge of a roof. MJ's fall continued downwards, about to send her careening into the abyss below.

"MJ!" Peter yelled, rushing forwards. MJ screamed as her feet left the ground; as her body started sailing through the blackness around them.

The red light followed Peter as he leapt off the building, acting like a spotlight that was trained on him. He still had his web-shooters on; he could catch her, just like he had caught Liz during the monstrosity that was the Washington field trip of sophomore year.

Wind rushed past his ears--God, Peter was really starting to hate the wind--as he fell. MJ was still screaming--a sound that scared Peter to death. He reached out his right hand, fingers touching the triggers on his web-shooter. He knew exactly how far his webs could reach and he knew that he had to time this right in order to catch MJ. Peter waited one millisecond...then two milliseconds... then he released his webs.

They soared gracefully through the air, latching onto MJ's stomach. They pulled her shirt up, causing her body to stop falling while her head still fell. Her head tilted back while her body was pulled upwards towards Peter. And that's when Peter realized that he had made a critical mistake.

In some car accidents, people get an injury known as whiplash. It is caused when the neck goes back and forth violently and has short- and long-term effects. Peter was reminded of this injury as he watched MJ's head continue falling while her body--which was attached to Peter's webs--stopped falling. He realized that MJ could sprain her neck or, even worse, snap it--an injury that no one could survive from. And it would all be Peter's fault.

*Snap!* Peter's enhanced senses heard her neck snap before he felt her go limp in his grasp. He gasped as she went limp, knowing that she was de--

*No*, Peter thought. He refused to believe that. He refused to believe that she was--

Peter pulled MJ towards him while, at the same time, he twisted his body so that he was looking up at the roof that they had just fallen from. With his right arm holding MJ tight to him, he brought his left hand up, releasing his webs so they flew towards the roof. After a few moments, he felt a tug--which told him that they had attached to the roof. He used it to slow his and MJ's descent. They finally got to the bottom, the hateful red light still on and showing the environment around them.

"MJ?" Peter asked. She was still in his grasp and, when he shook her, her head rolled limply. He ignored the awkward position of her head, telling himself that the angle was completely normal.

*It's not*, a part of his brain said. *She's--*

“Shut up!” Peter yelled. He laid MJ down on the ground, crouching down next to her. “MJ, please, answer me.” When she didn’t, he shook her again, harder this time. There was no response. “Answer me!” His voice broke with his command, sobs beginning to wrack over his body. “Answer...me...” he repeated, his voice breaking with his emotions. He checked her pulse, praying for the best. But he already knew that the worst had come; he knew that the instant MJ had appeared in this nightmare world.

Only it wasn’t a nightmare; it was reality.

His fingers couldn’t feel a pulse. Using his enhanced senses, Peter listened for a heartbeat, breathing, anything, but there was nothing. MJ was dead.

Peter leaned over MJ’s body, tears falling down his face. He sobbed, clutching MJ’s hand in his grip, even though the hand was growing colder with each second.

*Tsk, tsk*, the symbiote said. ***What have you done now?***

MJ’s body and the red light disappeared, leaving Peter alone in the dark with the voice in his head.

***Did you kill your crush? Did you kill her by trying to save her?***

Peter’s head snapped up. He didn’t want to deal with the symbiote’s crap right now. “Go away,” he said, knowing he was sounding like he was a toddler.

The symbiote laughed, sending shivers down Peter’s spine. ***Does the truth hurt, Peter? The only one at fault for her death is you. You used your webs, causing her neck to snap. She might’ve survived the fall, but she didn’t, thanks to your interference.***

Tears filled his eyes as Peter listened to the symbiote’s words. He knew that it was correct; MJ’s death was on him, just as Uncle Ben’s and May’s was. Everything was always his fault.

***But, we wonder***, the symbiote continued speaking. ***What would have happened if you had the automatic webs that we provided you? What would have happened if you had the heightened senses we provided you with? Would things have happened differently? Could you have prevented May’s death, with your heightened senses? Could you have saved MJ, stopped her from falling instead of snapping her neck? Let’s find out.***

The world rushed past Peter; colors and images appearing and disappearing randomly. Peter stood up, bringing his hands up to shield himself from the onslaught of colors and sounds. Suddenly, he found himself looking at...himself.

This Peter was in the black suit. He had the symbiote mask on and was turned away from Peter. Peter looked down to discover that he was wearing his normal suit. He looked back up at the new Peter and noticed that he was looking at someone. Peter followed the Symbiote-Peter’s eyesight and gasped. Symbiote-Peter was staring at...May. Peter smiled ecstatically when he saw that she was alive. He soon frowned, however, as he heard her words. They were identical to the same words she had told Peter only minutes ago. What was going on?

“I’m sorry, Peter,” she said. “I’m so sorry, honey.”

“May, what’s going on?” the Symbiote-Peter said. “What are you sorry for?”

Peter's confusion grew. Those words were the same exact words he had asked when May had appeared. He realized that the scene in front of him was not real; it was a hypothetical situation. May was still dead; Peter was still to blame. Tears stung at the corners of his eyes, but he blinked them away. Then, he noticed a slight difference between the scene in front of him and the real scene: The red light had been replaced by a yellow one. Peter's confusion grew larger. Why was the light different? What was the significance of the light changing?

"They found me," May said. "They found out who you were and they came after me. Peter, I--"

Peter closed his eyes, knowing what was about to happen. But her scream never came. Peter opened his eyes to find that the Symbiote-Peter had used his webs to pull May away from the spear. He had then grabbed the spear with his webs and pulled it away from the unknown attacker.

"Peter?" May asked. Because of Symbiote-Peter's webs, she had been pulled down to the ground. "Oh my God, what just happened?" She sounded hysterical and Peter hurried to get to her side.

But Symbiote-Peter got there first. He rushed to her side, pulling her up from where she had fallen. Symbiote-Peter hugged May, murmuring reassurances in her ear. "It's okay, May. I got you. Everything's fine."

The yellow light dimmed, causing Symbiote-Peter and May to disappear from Peter's view. He let them go, attempting to let go of what the scene had shown him. But he couldn't shake it that easily. Guilt bubbled up in his stomach as he realized that if he was better--if he had the powers that the symbiote could give him--he could've easily prevented May's death.

***It seems that we could've helped you. We could've stopped your aunt from dying. Maybe you should let us in. Maybe you should've let us have control.***

"No," Peter snapped. "I won't ever let you have control. Who knows what you would do?"

***We think it's pretty easy to see what we would do. We have your best interests in mind, Peter.***

"If you have my best interests in mind, why did you try to hurt Mr. Stark? Why did you threaten to reveal my identity?"

Peter could feel the symbiote's exasperation. ***You're so dramatic. We told you that we wanted--and still want--to hurt Mr. Stark because he doesn't care for you. He lied to you and it's best to remove toxic people from your life. So, we decided to punch him.***

***And we never really wanted to reveal your identity. No, we only wanted to scare you a little; scare you so that you could accept our encouragements.***

"Is that what you're trying to do now?" Peter asked. "None of this is real, right? May and MJ aren't really..."

***Ooo, now that one we can't answer. It's real that Uncle Ben's death is your fault. It's true that Mr. Stark almost died because of you. So it should mean that everything else is the truth, right? May's dead, because of you. MJ's dead, because of you. But it could've been prevented, if you only accepted our help. So, Peter, the only logical conclusion would be for you to--***

"No!" Peter yelled. "I won't do it. I won't ever accept you."

***Really? Even if our help meant that MJ could still be alive?***

The red light appeared again, illuminating the image of MJ standing on the edge of a roof. Peter felt the wind start to pick up and he ran to catch her before she started falling again. Only, he was too late. MJ fell off the roof--yet again--with a scream and Peter leaped after her, just as he had mere minutes ago.

Wind rushed past his ears--God, Peter was really starting to hate the wind--as he fell. MJ was still screaming--a sound that scared Peter to death. He reached out his right hand, fingers touching the triggers on his web-shooter. He knew exactly how far his webs could reach and he knew that he had to time this right in order to catch MJ. Peter waited one millisecond...then two milliseconds... then he released his webs.

Only they didn't release. Peter looked down and realized that he was out of web fluid. He had another cartridge in the pocket of his suit, but it would be impossible for him to retrieve it and reload while free-falling like he was. Nevertheless, he still had to try.

***If you accept us, we can save her. The webs we can give you are self-replenishing.***

"No!" Peter shouted. "I can do it!" He twisted in midair, trying to get the web cartridge out. His fingers found it and he began to pull it out of his pocket triumphantly. However, it was only half-way out before it slipped out his grasp. Peter watched, his heart plummeting, as he watched it tumble end over end into the abyss below. MJ's chance of survival tumbled with it.

Peter met MJ's eyes while they fell, trying to communicate how sorry he was for failing her for a second time; trying to tell her in that one glance that he loved her.

And in that one glance, Peter remembered what had led to him accepting the symbiote in the first place. And then he altered his decision, changing it to relate to the scenario in front of him.

~~Whatever plan Mr. Beck had, Peter would follow it.~~ Whatever thing the symbiote could give him to save MJ, Peter would accept it.

~~All Peter wanted to do was to be Spider-Man completely and forget the life of Peter Parker.~~ All Peter wanted to do was save MJ and ensure he would never fail her again.

*Whatever it took.* Whatever it took.

"I accept," Peter whispered.

***What did you say?*** the symbiote said. ***We can't hear you over the wind.***

"I accept!" he shouted. "Just, save her!" He shuddered as he felt the symbiote close itself around him. He looked down and saw that his suit had changed back to being black with the white spider on his chest. Peter shuddered again as the mask closed itself around him. But, as what happened when the mask first covered his face, his apprehension towards the symbiote disappeared when it finished forming around him. His right arm moved of its own accord. Earlier, when the symbiote was controlling him, Peter felt afraid. He had been scared as to what the symbiote was going to do.

Now, though, he felt more indifferent than anything else. He barely noticed what was happening around; barely noticed that he wasn't the one moving his arm--the symbiote was. A part of Peter felt that he should be worried that he wasn't fearful, but that part was too quiet for him to hear it. Moving on their own as well, his fingers pressed on his web-shooter, releasing his webs.

They soared gracefully through the air, latching onto MJ's hand. They pulled her hand up, causing her to stop falling. She looked up at Peter, her eyes wide and terrified. And that's when Peter

realized that he had saved MJ.

In life or death situations, many people claim to say that time seemed to slow down and that they noticed--and remembered--the tiniest of details. These little details are ones that, typically, are overlooked in daily life. Peter was reminded of this claim as he realized that he, too, would remember the littlest details when he saved MJ. He would always remember the way MJ's hair was blowing in the wind, one strand sticking to her lip; he would always remember how wide her eyes were, the only time he had ever seen her so visibly afraid; he would always remember how desperately he held onto his web, so intent on not failing her for the second time. And, above all, Peter would always remember that it was thanks to him that MJ was safe and alive.

Peter pulled MJ towards him while, at the same time, he twisted his body so that he was looking up at the roof that they had just fallen from. With his right arm holding MJ tight to him, he brought his left hand up, releasing his webs so they flew towards the roof. After a few moments, he felt a tug--which told him that they had attached to the roof. He used it to slow his and MJ's descent. They finally got to the bottom, giving Peter a sense of déjà vu. Only, this time, the hateful red light wasn't what was showing the environment around them.

It was the yellow light from the hypothetical scenario between Symbiote-Peter and May. Peter closed his eyes in defeat, since its appearance meant that what had happened wasn't real. It was just another hypothetical situation, meaning that the actual MJ was dead. Tears fell down Peter's face as he realized that MJ was still dead. The hypothetical MJ disappeared in Peter's arms when he made that realization.

*If only*, the symbiote said. *If only you had given us control in the beginning.*

Peter didn't say anything, grief and guilt building inside of him.

*Will you allow us control now? Will you accept us permanently, now that you have seen that we had a sensible reason for hurting Mr. Stark? That we can help you be Spider-Man? As your uncle said: with great power comes great responsibility. You have tremendous power, Peter, but you cannot wield the responsibility that comes with it. You killed your uncle and you almost killed your mentor because you can't bear the burden of that responsibility. You killed May and MJ, due to the fact that you can't handle the responsibility.*

*We can help you Peter. We can help you accomplish your uncle's high expectations. We can help you wield the responsibility that the spider gave you. We've already proven it; we managed to save your aunt and MJ. We can help you prevent other nonsensical deaths. All you have to do is accept us. All you have to do is let us control you. Give us control, Peter.*

Peter kept his eyes closed, his mind reeling from what the symbiote was saying and what it had shown him. It was right; he couldn't live up to Uncle Ben's morals. He couldn't handle the great responsibilities that had been given to him when he had gotten his powers. If the symbiote could help him do so; if the symbiote could help him prevent what had happened to May, to Uncle Ben, to MJ, then the choice was obvious. After all, he became Spider-Man to prevent other kids from losing their father figure, like he had.

"Fine," Peter said, opening his eyes. "I accept you. I'll give you control."

*Very good, Peter*, the symbiote said, sounding very pleased with Peter's decision. The yellow light disappeared. Peter closed his eyes, expecting to be thrown into the dark, nightmare world again. However, the darkness never came. Peter opened his eyes to find that he was back on the rooftop with Mr. Beck. He was laying on the ground and he blinked his eyes from the sudden brightness.

He sat up, looking up at the sky to find that the sun was setting.

“Peter?” a voice asked. Peter turned to see that Mr. Beck was still next to him. He had taken off his helmet and his mist had disappeared.

“Hey, Mr. Beck,” Peter said.

“What happened? You were zoned out for quite a while.”

Peter shrugged, tears glistening in his eyes as he recalled what had happened. “May’s dead. So is MJ.”

Mr. Beck looked at Peter in alarm. In the last week, Peter had confided in the man about his crush on MJ. He had also gone into great detail about who his family was. Because of that, Mr. Beck knew very well who May and MJ were and what they meant to Peter. “Kid--”

“And the symbiote talked to me,” Peter interrupted.

That shut Mr. Beck up. “It did? What did it say?”

Peter stood up, surprised to find that he was completely steady. After the emotional rollercoaster he went on, he was anticipating that he would be unable to stand. “It told me to give it control.”

“And? Did you?”

Peter turned away from Mr. Beck, beginning to make his way to the edge of the roof.

“Peter?” Mr. Beck called after him.

He turned around to face the hero. “I’m not Peter,” he said, a grin filling his face.

Mr. Beck looked confused and slightly alarmed by the look on Peter’s face.

“***We are Venom,***” both the symbiote and Peter said at the same time.

### **Part Three**

*And if she had the proper words to say, she would tell him*

**End**

### Chapter End Notes

And that's the end of part three! I hope everyone enjoyed this week's chapter and the end of the part. Unfortunately, this will be the last chapter I post in awhile. I'm planning on participating in Nano for the first time (which I am so excited for!) and I can't keep up with posting while doing Nano. I hope you guys understand and I'll see you guys again Wednesday, December 1st for the start of part four!

# Chapter Twelve

## Chapter Notes

Happy December! I'm sorry for the month long wait, but here's chapter twelve. I hope you guys enjoy reading it and I hope you like the start of part four!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## Part Four

*But she'd have nothing left to sell him*

*Tuesday, September 19, 2023*

Tony flew through the city, thoughts running rampant in his head. Peter had lied to him. Peter was hanging out with Mysterio. Peter was struggling after being brought back to life. Peter had said that he wished that he was still dead. Peter had almost hit Tony. Tony hadn't seen his struggles; he was too focused on the joy of having his kid back to recognize how hurt he was. Everything was a jumbled mess of emotions and thoughts, all clamoring for attention. Yet Tony couldn't focus on it all at the same time.

*"Incoming call from May Parker-Hogan," FRIDAY said.*

Sighing, Tony said, "Answer."

*"Did you find Peter?"* May asked, quickly getting to the reason why she called him.

"Yeah, I did," Tony responded, not wanting to give any more information than that.

*"And? Did you talk to him?"*

"Yeah. Something's definitely up with him."

*"We already know that one, Tony. You have to give me more information than that."*

Tony closed his eyes, trying to figure out how to best say what had happened exactly. That turned out to be a mistake. FRIDAY called out a warning to him and he quickly opened his eyes, seconds away from hitting a building. He swerved to the right, narrowly missing the skyscraper. "May, I'm sorta flying right now. Can I call you back?"

*"Flying? Are you coming back here?"*

"No," Tony replied. "I'm heading to the Tower."

*"The Tower? Why?"*

"I need to do something."

*"Tony, Peter's still out there. He needs you right now and whatever you need to do can wait."*

"May, what I need to do will help Peter."



*“Tony, I feel like I’m missing something. Please, tell me what happened when you confronted him.”*

Tony sighed, then landed on top of a roof. What he was about to say was emotional and required his full attention. He couldn’t explain what had happened while flying to the Tower. “He told Mysterio who he is. He told me Mysterio’s name--which is Beck, by the way--and I can’t shake the feeling that I know him from somewhere. He seemed familiar and I know I’ve heard his name before. So, I’m heading over to the Tower to do a background check.”

*“Hold up. Did you say that Peter told this new hero, Bell or something, his name? Like, he revealed his identity?”*

“Yep. He had his mask off and everything.”

*“Oh my God ,”* May said, her voice dropping to a whisper. Her next words were louder. *“I’m guessing you yelled at him?”*

“I did. Peter then yelled at me and things sorta...spiraled.”

*“What do you mean by spiraled?”*

Tony wasn’t planning on telling May much more than what he had already told her, but May had an annoying habit of asking the right questions, questions that forced him to tell her everything. “He said that everything has changed. That you and I aren’t there for him anymore.” Tony sighed, fearful of his next two sentences. These two things were what worried him the most and were the most prevalent in his tumultuous thoughts. “That he should’ve never returned. And then he almost punched me.”

May sucked in a breath. *“He said that? H-he said that we’re aren’t there? But, I-I-”* May stuttered. Her next sentence sounded like a revelation; like a realization she hadn’t voiced or even thought of before. *“I’ve been so focused on my work lately. I left our trip to your house early, so I could go to work. I didn’t realize that he had skipped school until the school called me, two whole hours after he had skipped. I didn’t realize how much he was struggling until now. I haven’t talked to him about how he is adjusting, didn’t even think that he would have any issues with coming back to life. He’s right, Tony. Oh my God, he is so right. He’s struggling right now because everything has changed and we weren’t there to help him.”*

“But nothing’s changed, May!” Tony insisted. “And we were there to help him! We still are! And he tried to tell me that I don’t care about him; that you don’t care about him. But that couldn’t be farther from the truth. If I didn’t care about him, I wouldn’t be in the city right now. If you didn’t care about him, you wouldn’t be freaking out over him being missing. If we didn’t care about him, we wouldn’t be worried right now.”

*“Yes, Tony, it’s easy to see that we do care about him. No one’s disputing that. The issue here is that we weren’t there for him when he needed us the most. Think about it, Tony. The world flipped upside down, seemingly overnight, for him. He died on Titan, then woke up and discovered that you had married Pepper. He found out that you had a daughter named Morgan. And that girl grew up on stories about Spider-Man. She knows everything there is to know about him, yet he had never heard of her before. Not to mention, Happy and I got married and moved into a different apartment. Everyone he called his family moved on from him and the home that he thought he had was ripped away from him. And, to us, these changes happened gradually over the course of five years. That’s not true for him. These changes happened suddenly, over the course of one second. One moment he was dying on Titan in 2018; the next, he’s waking up on Titan in 2023. And he had no idea how much time had passed. He had no idea that everything had changed.”*

*“And what did you and I do? What did we do when he was figuring out how to navigate this new world? We ignored the signs that signaled that he wasn’t okay. We were so happy that he was back--that he was alive--that we forced him to feel like he wasn’t allowed to feel anything but happy. You know how he is, Tony; you know how selfless he is. He’s willing to put his feelings aside because he doesn’t want to burden us with them. He hasn’t been adjusting, but he didn’t want to confide in us because he didn’t want us to have to be worried for him. And we let him, because we were too blind to see it.*

*“And then Mysterio popped up. He was probably the first person that wasn’t expecting anything of him; wasn’t expecting him to be happy all the time, unlike us. We expected him to be happy because we were happy to see him again; to see our son that we thought we had lost forever. No wonder he gravitated towards Mysterio. No wonder he was so quick to put his trust in the hero; to take off his mask. Because he did so, literally and figuratively. Mysterio was the only one Peter felt comfortable confiding his feelings in, so he took off the facade of being happy and showed the hero just how much he was struggling.*

*“We weren’t there for him, Tony. We pushed him away. We are the ones to blame for this. We expected so much of him that he feels that we don’t really care for him. He feels so alone that he feels that he shouldn’t have come back from the dead; he feels so overwhelmed that he lashed out at you physically. And it breaks my heart that that is how he feels; that that is what he had done. And it hurts me even more when I realize that I could have prevented his pain, if only I had the sight to see it; if only I had paid more attention to him.”*

And it was breaking Tony’s heart as well. The idea of Peter thinking that Tony didn’t care for him physically hurt Tony. And it did hurt even more that everything was there, if only Tony had seen it; if only he had paid more attention. Peter had seemed distant during his visit at Tony’s house and he had never texted or called him in the nine days following the visit.

But, wait. He had noticed Peter’s strange behavior. He had mentioned it to Pepper only that morning.

*But you didn’t do anything with that information,* he thought. And that was almost worse than not noticing it in the first place. It had taken him nine days to finally reach out to the kid himself and it had proven too late; Peter was already too far gone.

“May, we failed him. We did this. And it’s up to us to fix this.” But they weren’t alone in this. No, the kid had more people on his side than just the two of them. “And we got Happy and Pepper who’ll help us.”

May laughed weakly. *“That we do. Speaking of which, Happy booked the next flight out of Los Angeles. He’ll be here...”* May’s voice trailed off, making Tony’s fear spike. Why didn’t she finish her sentence? What was happening on her end?

“May? Is everything okay?”

*“There’s something wrong with Peter’s vitals. They’re all over the place .”*

Tony’s heart skipped a beat. “Karen?” Tony asked. Thanks to the suit that was still on him, he still had access to Peter’s vitals and location, allowing him to see the irregularities for himself. “Can you pull up the kid’s vitals?”

The question wasn’t even fully out of his mouth before Karen was doing so. She began to read off the abnormal behavior. *“In the last five minutes, there has been an increase in heart rate. Peter’s body temperature has also increased.”*

“Increased?” Tony asked.

*“There’s an increase in everything, Tony,”* May said. Tony suddenly remembered that he was on the phone with her and that she couldn’t hear what Karen was saying. *“Some of it can be easily explained by a patrol, like the heart rate and breathing increase. But--”*

“There’s an increase in body temp. Which is odd, since there’s been a cold front.” The temperature had dipped in the 50s recently, a temperature that caused Tony to grab the nearest sweatshirt and Peter to grab the nearest winter coat. “Unless he’s inside.”

*“Tony, his temperature is at 99 right now. There’s no way it could’ve increased that much just because he’s standing next to a heater .”*

Tony agreed. Peter’s temperature always ran cool, thanks to the spider bite. His average was around 96 degrees whereas the normal average should be around 98.

*“Mr. Stark,”* Karen interrupted. *“There’s more. His blood pressure has increased. I’ve also detected an unknown substance in the air around him.”*

Suddenly, Tony was grateful for his decision to put in an air monitoring system in the kid’s suit. It had seemed that it was an unnecessary item at the time of installation but it had just proved its usefulness. “Unknown substance? You’re gonna have to elaborate, Kare.”

*“Tony? What is the AI--”*

*“I’m running a scan now,”* Karen said, talking over May. *“I believe it’s some sort of hallucinogen.”*

“A what?” Tony exclaimed. How in the hell did the kid come across a hallucinogen?

*“A hallucinogen, Mr. Stark,”* Karen repeated. *“It appears to be similar to LSD.”*

Tony’s hands clenched at his side. What was happening? “Is he on patrol?” Tony asked, for that was the only explanation. Peter had probably come across a drug deal gone wrong.

*“No,”* Karen answered, causing Tony to be confused. *“He’s on a roof.”*

*“Tony!”* May yelled. *“What is happening?”*

“Karen’s saying that there is a hallucinogen in the air around Peter. It’s not in his system, but he’s--”

*“Mr. Stark,”* Karen interrupted. *“I believe the gas is in Peter’s system.”* Tony froze, his words dying on his tongue. Seeming to sense that Tony’s silence was a request for her to explain, she hurried to do so. *“LSD can cause the symptoms that Peter’s vitals are showing right now. Increased heart rate, body temperature, breathing, and blood pressure.”*

“Shit,” Tony said. “Karen, where is he? I need to get to him. I need--”

*“The tracker has been disabled.”*

“Shit!” Tony exclaimed. “How? Karen, can you give me anything? CCTV footage, previous locations, anything, Kare. Do you understand? *Anything*. Hack anything you need to in order to give me a location. I don’t care if--”

*“Tony, answer me !”* May yelled. *“What’s wrong? What’s wrong with Peter?”*

“The hallucinogen is what is causing Peter’s vitals to be off. And his tracker is turned off; I can’t do anything. He’s stopped, not on patrol and I can’t--”

*“Slow down! Start from the beginning, slowly.”*

Tony took a deep breath, trying to gather his scattered thoughts. “Karen has identified a hallucinogen in the air around Peter. Peter breathed it in and that is what is causing the abnormalities in his vitals. But--and this is what’s bothering me the most--he’s not on patrol. He’s standing still on a rooftop somewhere. How did he come across the hallucinogen if he’s not busting a drug deal somewhere?”

*“Mysterio,”* May said. *“It’s him. I know it is.”*

And now that May said that, Tony knew that it had to be the new hero. He knew that there was something wrong with the hero from the start. It seemed that he was right; Mysterio was giving drugs to minors now.

*“Tony,”* May said. *“Find him. He needs you right now and--”*

“His tracker is off,” Tony said, closing his eyes. “I don’t know where he is.”

May went quiet. Then, she exploded in a fury of words. *“Dammit. I’m going to kill Mysterio. I’m going to absolutely kill him if he’s the one behind this. First, he encouraged Peter’s absence from school. Now he’s off giving him drugs. And that’s another thing. What’s happening with Peter right now? Is he okay? Well, obviously not, if his vitals are anything to guess from. I-is he dying? Oh my God, I don’t know what I’ll do if he is. I c-can’t do it, Tony. I c-can’t handle losing him again. Not when we just got him b-back.”* She sucked in a shaky breath and Tony realized that she was currently crying.

“May, I swear to you,” Tony said. “We are not going to lose him. Not again. Not ever again. He’ll be fine. I’ll find him, if it’s the last thing I do.” He left his last sentences unsaid, knowing that May wouldn’t like his guilt complex. *I already failed him once on Titan. I already failed him again by being blind to how much he was struggling after the Blip. I’m not failing him a third time, never again .*

May inhaled another shaky breath. Her crying was quiet, yet Tony could hear the tears in her voice. *“I c-can’t be the only Parker again, Tony.”*

“Hey, hey,” Tony said. “May, you’re not alone. You’re never alone. You have Happy and Pepper and me and Morgan. We’re with you, May. You’re a part of our family as much as Peter is. Believe me.”

May laughed weakly. *“Am I the crazy aunt of the family?”*

Tony grinned, but his smile was forced. “With your cooking skills? Definitely.”

*“Mr. Stark,”* Karen interrupted. *“I have searched all the data you asked me to.”*

“May, I’m going to have to let you go. I’m going to start work on finding Peter.”

*“Ok. Keep me posted, please.”* With that, May hung up, leaving Tony free to talk with Karen.

“Alright, Kare,” he said. “Tell me what you found.” He activated his repulsors, heading in the direction of the Tower. He would have more resources there.

*“There is nothing, Mr. Stark.”*

His flight dipped, bringing him closer to the ground before he righted himself. “Karen, I thought I asked you to search everything.”

*“And I have. There is no footage of Peter after his argument with you.”*

Tony’s fear increased as he heard Karen’s words. If Karen was unable to find anything, then how was he supposed to? But he had to try. Peter needed him.

## Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked the start of part four! See you next week for the next chapter!

# Chapter Thirteen

## Chapter Notes

Good morning! I hope everyone's weeks were good and I hope you enjoy this week's chapter! It's the longest one in the entire story (a little over 13k) and was my favorite one to write by far.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### Part Four

*But she'd have nothing left to see him*

*Tuesday, September 19, 2023*

Tony landed on the helicopter pad of the Tower. He tapped his nanite housing unit, letting the suit disappear around him. He walked towards the door, which--thanks to FRIDAY--had been unlocked for him. He began to walk through the door, but froze in the doorway. Light was shining through the windows, letting him easily see the living room in front of him. Dust had settled on the couches, coffee table, and entertainment stand. Tony looked over at the kitchen and the dining room, seeing the dust sitting on the table, chairs, and countertops. He took it all in and sighed.

Tony closed his eyes, breathing in the memories of the room. It was here where the Avengers had defeated Loki. It was here where Ultron had attacked the Avengers. It was here where the Avengers had lived and worked, before the Accords fiasco. It was here where Peter had spent time with Tony, before Peter had turned to ash in his arms.

All of these memories, both good or bad, flooded through Tony's mind, causing him to reflect back on his life as an Avenger and as Peter's mentor. The Avengers were done; had been done ever since the Germany fight, but he still had Peter. God, that kid. After Germany and Siberia, Tony had felt that all hope was gone. The world had been a dark, dark place after the fight with Steve and Barnes. But, in the midst of that darkness was Peter. Peter was a spot of light, of hope, and--in him--Tony had found himself feeling hopeful again. Tony had thought that he had lost him forever on Titan, but--against all odds--Peter had come back. And now, there was a chance that he was slipping like dust through Tony's hands, just like he had five years ago. And Tony was not going to let it happen again.

Tony reopened his eyes and walked over to the elevator. He headed down to the floor where his old lab was, pushing away memories that clamored for his attention. He was only focused on one thing and one thing only: Finding Peter's location.

Once at the lab, FRIDAY turned on the lights and pulled up camera footage. "*Karen alerted me of the problem while you were flying,*" the AI said. "*I have pulled up the last footage of Peter.*"

Tony looked at the footage, frowning when he saw that it was dated as 09/12/23. If he had his days right--he quickly checked the date on his phone--today's date was 09/19/23. A whole week after the footage's date.

"FRI," he said. "That's outdated. I need to know where Peter is currently, not where he was last Tuesday."

*“As I said, boss, this is the last footage of Peter. After this recording, Peter is never seen on camera again.”*

Tony frowned. FRIDAY’s last sentence was dark and he hated the sentence’s connotation. “Play the footage for me, FRIDAY.”

The video began to play. There was no audio and it was in black and white, but Tony could still tell what was happening. The camera was placed on a nearby roof and was angled down to where Mysterio was standing on a roof, his helmet on the ground beside him. Tony looked at the time and saw that it was a few minutes after Peter’s school let out. A few seconds of watching Mysterio standing eerily still, Spider-Man appeared.

He was still in his normal red and blue suit, which was another point of confusion for Tony. Tony had thought that he had painted the black suit while he was staying at Tony’s house, yet the video had been recorded a few days after that visit. How could he have painted over the red and blue suit while at Tony’s house, then wear the red and blue suit a few days after? Tony then remembered the way the suit had changed colors. How did Peter make it do that? He then looked at the mask Peter was wearing and realized that it was the original mask.

“Pause,” he said. The video instantly stopped. “Why are you showing me this footage? Peter has his old mask on, the one with the baby monitor protocol. Why don’t we look at that? There’s gotta be much better visuals and audio in Karen’s footage.”

*“Because,”* FRIDAY replied, sounding like she was explaining an easy concept to a five-year-old. God, Tony really needed to stop giving his AIs the same sass as his. *“Peter takes his mask off in a few moments.”* Tony’s jaw clenched, but he didn’t interrupt FRIDAY as she spoke. *“Karen’s would only show you audio while this camera gives you video.”*

“Okay, then combine the two,” Tony said. “Play Karen’s audio over the video.”

*“Rendering.”*

After a few seconds, the video started again, this time with audio.

*“Kid,”* Mysterio said, turning to face Peter.

Peter pulled his mask off, making Tony angry. His biggest fear when it came to Mysterio was Mysterio discovering who Peter was. That was the sole reason why he had told Peter to stay away from the new hero. To know that Peter had revealed his identity three days after his promise that he’d stay away...it made Tony furious.

*“Hey, Mr. Beck,”* Peter said. *“What’s your idea?”*

Idea? Tony’s face wrinkled in confusion. What was Peter talking about?

Mysterio chuckled. *“Eager, aren’t you?”* He leaned against the railing surrounding the roof. *“Let me tell you a story first.”* Tony swallowed his impatience, forcing himself to listen to Mysterio’s words instead of fastforwarding. All villains were the same, and Mysterio was no different. They all liked to hear themselves talk and enjoyed monologuing.

*“During the Blip years, I wandered the world, looking for a way to help people. Eventually, I gained these powers.”* He held up his hands as a green mist appeared. Tony figured that the mist was one of his powers. *“But, while I was returning to New York, I discovered...something. This something was in a crater created by a meteorite that had recently crashed on Earth. It was a black substance and can only be defined as a symbiote.”*

"A symbiote?" Peter interrupted. *"You discovered an alien symbiote?"*

"Oh my God," Tony said under his breath. He had no idea where the hero was going with this story, but he could tell it was nowhere good.

"Yes," Mysterio said.

"*Holy cow!*" Peter exclaimed. Tony smiled as he heard Peter's astonished voice. It was clear he was absolutely freaking out about the alien symbiote, just as Tony himself was. But they were freaking out for entirely different reasons. *"Do you know how crazy that is? Not only are there, like, aliens--the New York attack in 2012 revealed that--but there are alien parasites? That's insane. It's more than insane, it's--"* Tony frowned as Peter broke off. His frown deepened as he noticed Mysterio's raised eyebrow. *"Sorry. It's really cool."*

"Don't apologize, Pete," Tony whispered.

*"Don't ever apologize for being the smartest one in the room, kid,"* Mysterio said. Tony looked up at the video of Mysterio in shock. Mysterio had told Peter to not apologize, something that Tony had just done mere seconds ago. *"Yes, I discovered a symbiote. It is not a parasite, though. You've taken biology, right?"* Tony tilted his head in confusion. Where was Mysterio going with this train of thought?

Peter shrugged. *"I like chemistry more, but yeah."*

*"Then you are familiar with the three different symbiotic relationships?"*

Peter nodded. *"A symbiotic relationship is any sort of relationship between two different organisms. The three main types are mutualism, commensalism, and parasitism. Mutualism is where both organisms benefit from the relationship. Commensalism is where one organism is helped and the other one is neither helped nor harmed. The last type is parasitism, a relationship where one organism is benefited, while the other one is harmed. The harm might be so bad that the host could be killed."*

*"Exactly,"* Mysterio said. *"This symbiote falls under the mutualism type of symbiosis. It will help you be Spider-Man; make you stronger, quicker, better. At the same, the symbiote is given a home. It can't survive without a host."*

*Oh, hell no,* Tony thought. Just the thought of Peter as a host to the alien symbiote was bringing Tony to the edge of a panic attack.

"Wait," Peter said. *"So your idea is for me to accept this...thing?"*

"Yes."

Peter stepped away from Mysterio. Tony felt his heart soar as he watched Peter refuse Mysterio's plan. *"Woah, hold up, absolutely not. There is no way that I can do that. A symbiote? Living inside of me? No, that's freaky as hell."*

"Good job, Peter," Tony said.

*"Peter,"* Mysterio said, making Tony remember why he was mad at Peter in the first place. How long had Mysterio known Peter's identity? And just what was he planning on doing with that information? *"It's completely harmless."*

*Like hell it is,* Tony thought.



Mysterio continued talking. *“Like I said, it’ll help you. It’ll teach you how to be Spider-Man better and help you to be accepted by your family.”*

Tony frowned. Peter was already accepted by his family; he didn’t need any help in that category.

*“Think about it, Peter. You know that your family doesn’t want to be around you.”*

Tony’s face paled. That sentence was very, very far from the truth. He had saved the entire world just to bring Peter back, for God’s sake!

*“Mr. Stark has been pushing you away in favor of spending time with his biological daughter.”*

Tony felt his legs give out beneath him as he collapsed onto the chair behind him. He hadn’t meant to push Peter away. Never would he ever push Peter away. He wasn’t choosing Morgan over Peter. He would never choose one of his kids over the other.

*“But that’s not all. Your aunt has been working non-stop. When’s the last time you talked to her, Pete?”*

Tony’s jaw clenched. Hearing the hero use his nickname for Peter made him want to punch the hero. But he couldn’t, seeing that he was staring at a computer screen version of Mysterio. Mysterio’s words also struck a chord within him. They were similar to what May herself had said when she was on the phone with him. Tony looked closely at Peter, trying to guess the thoughts swimming in his head. What he saw hurt him to his core.

Peter looked sad. He didn’t look shocked at the hero’s words or angry either. Both of those expressions on his face would have signaled that he thought that Mysterio’s words weren’t true and that he wasn’t buying a single word that the hero was saying. No, he was sad. He looked hurt. And that meant that he thought that Mysterio was correct. He thought that Tony was pushing him away. He thought that Tony had chosen Morgan over him. He thought that his aunt cared more about her job than him. And the hardest thing was that he truly believed it. Peter believed it so much that he thought of Mysterio’s words as a truth; a steadfast truth that was as true as the ground beneath him. And it hurt Tony so very much.

Because it wasn’t true. It wasn’t meant to be a steadfast truth. It wasn’t true that his aunt cared more about her job than him. It wasn’t true that Tony had chosen Morgan over him. It wasn’t true that Tony was pushing him away. Mysterio wasn’t correct.

Peter’s face contorted in anger for a brief second before shifting back to sadness. Tony felt his heart break a little as he watched the anger flash over Peter’s face. Because he knew who that anger was directed at. And it wasn’t at Tony; it was at himself. Peter was angry at himself for thinking that there was reality where Mysterio’s words were incorrect. He was mad at himself for thinking that Tony and May cared for him.

*“But Spider-Man, Peter,” Mysterio said. “Spider-Man. Little Morgan Stark has grown up hearing bedtime stories of Spider-Man. Why do you think that is? Maybe it’s because Stark has always cared more about Spider-Man than regular-old Peter Parker.”*

“No!” Tony said, springing up from the chair. He stood up so fast that the chair that he was sitting on fell backwards. “It’s not true! Peter, I care more about *you* ! I could care less about Spider-Man!” He knew that he was yelling at a Peter who was on a screen--a Peter who couldn’t hear him--but he didn’t care. All that mattered was yelling out his shouting thoughts.

*“That’s why you two met in the first place, wasn’t it? Because Stark wanted to recruit Spider-*

*Man?"*

That may have been the reason why Tony had stepped foot in that Queens apartment seven years ago, but that had changed the second he had watched Peter soaring through the air after being swatted away by Ant-Man (or--more accurately--Giant-Man). That had changed the second he had seen an unmoving Peter laying on the ground of a German airport.

*"He doesn't care about you, Pete."*

"Peter, it's not true! I care about you so damn much!"

*"He never did."*

"Peter, don't listen to him!"

*"How could a billionaire like him ever care about sixteen-year-old Peter Parker?"*

"C'mon, Peter," Tony yelled. "You know that--" His words died on his tongue as he looked at Peter.

Tears were pooling up in the corners of his eyes, threatening to fall. He was shaking with the emotions that were most likely raging inside of him. His hands were clenched, showing that he was trying to stave off the sobs building inside of him. Watching Peter's reaction broke Tony's heart completely. Because it proved--yet again--that Peter believed Mysterio's words.

*"Spider-Man is the only thing that concerns him."*

"Pete..." Tony said, his voice breaking.

*"So why not become Spider-Man completely? And if the symbiote helps you accomplish that goal, why would you deny it? Because it's a symbiote? Peter, that's bullshit."*

Tony's hands clenched. Peter had a perfectly, sound reason to not accept the symbiote; a reason that Tony was fully backing. How dare he belittle the kid's valid reasoning?

*"So what if it is a symbiote? If it helps you accomplish your goals, who cares about the means?"*  
He held up a jar that had been sitting on the ground next to him. The sides of it were clear, allowing Tony to see the black substance inside of it.

Seeing the creature inside absolutely freaked Tony out. It was so obviously alien. It vindicated all of Tony's worst nightmares; the nightmares about an alien worming its way into his family, destroying the people he cherished most in the world. And one alien had already done so. One alien had already appeared, killing half of the world; killing the kid who had become a son to him. Now, a new alien was about to mess with his kid.

If Peter allowed it.

Tony looked at Peter, trying to get a read on the kid. What he saw scared him to no end.

Peter was clearly torn. He seemed to be trying to decide the hardest decision of his life and it hurt Tony that it was. There should be only one answer to what Mysterio was offering: No. And a profound "no" at that. Yet Peter was torn. And Tony knew that it was all his fault. Mysterio's reasons for the symbiote were all tied to what Tony had failed to do. Tony had failed in seeing that Peter was struggling. Tony had failed to let Peter show his true emotions. Tony had failed in protecting Peter from Mysterio. And now, Peter was paying the price for it.

Suddenly, Peter's face changed to that of resolution. Peter had made a decision, but Tony felt that it wasn't a decision he was going to like.

"*Fine*," Peter said.

"Peter, no!" Tony yelled.

But Peter couldn't hear him. He held out his hand, taking the jar from Mysterio. He opened it and looked down at the black glop inside. Tony felt shivers down his spine as he watched the symbiote crawl up the sides of the container. He watched, in horror, as it ended up on Peter's hand. His heart broke even more as he saw Peter's terrified face as the symbiote absorbed into Peter's suit. It changed the suit from red and blue into black, finally offering an answer to Tony's confusion. Tony saw Peter's face turn to one of fear and regret, telling him that the kid had changed his mind.

Suddenly, Peter's eyes widened, but from what Tony couldn't say. He assumed that it was from his increasing fear, since Peter started to pull at the symbiote. He was, obviously, showing that he didn't want to accept the symbiote anymore and Mysterio reached forward, grabbing Peter's hands. Rage consumed Tony as he saw that the hero was stopping Peter from backing out of his decision, forcing him to accept the symbiote.

And that's when Tony realized that that was what was happening the entire time. Mysterio was forcing Peter to accept the symbiote, twisting Tony's and May's actions to make Peter feel lonely. And then he had swooped in, telling the kid that him and his plan alone was the only course of action that Peter could take if he ever wanted to be loved again.

But why? Why would Mysterio go through all that trouble? For the life of him, Tony couldn't figure out why Mysterio would offer the symbiote or what he was hoping to gain by turning Peter into...Evil-Peter. Tony began to go through the list of things that were different with Peter ever since accepting the symbiote. Peter had begun to fail at school. Peter had grown distant from Tony and May. Peter had physically lashed out at Tony.

Where was the pretty picture those three events created? What was the line connecting them, explaining why Mysterio would offer the symbiote? As hard as Tony tried to see it, he couldn't connect the dots. To him, there was nothing, nothing behind Mysterio's actions. Yet there had to be. Mysterio had to have a motive, a reason as to why he decided to hang out with the kid. And Tony was willing to bet that Mysterio's motive could be drawn back to his past. Meaning that Tony was back to his original plan: Finding out who Mysterio was.

Finding out who Mysterio was had other perks as well. If Tony couldn't find the kid using any normal means, there might be something he could dredge up from Mysterio's past. Maybe he lived in New York when he was a kid, and Peter was currently stuck in said childhood home. Perhaps Mysterio's past would reveal where Mysterio had previously taken minors and drugged them up, maybe that was where Peter was. Both were valid, yet both rested on the discovery of Mysterio's past.

Tony looked back to the video, deciding to finish watching it before throwing himself at his new (well, original) plan.

The symbiote wrapped itself around Peter's face, creating the new black mask. Its formation answered the last questions Tony had had about Peter's new look. Mysterio let go of Peter's hands and stepped away.

"*Good work, kid*," the hero said.

Tony's hands clenched again. Mysterio was congratulating the kid for allowing him to manipulate him. He was congratulating the kid for accepting a symbiote that was absolutely a parasite, no matter how vehemently he had denied that fact.

*"Want to take it for a test-ride?"*

Tony saw Peter's smile before he replied. *"I would love to."* His voice was completely confident; devoid of any of the fear he had been harboring only seconds before. His voice sounded eager; gone was the sadness and anger that had been consuming him seconds ago.

Then, Peter and Mysterio left the roof. Tony heard Peter's excited shout as he webbed away, but it sounded like it was fading; like Peter was getting farther and farther away from the microphone. Tony saw something red and blue (and suspiciously similar to the mask Tony had made for the kid) flutter to the ground. And then the video feed cut to black, telling Tony that the segment that FRIDAY had wanted him to see was over. A rewind button appeared, which would let Tony replay the video if he wanted to.

"Okay, FRI," Tony said. "Let's move onto the next thing. Who is Mysterio?"

*"Beck."*

Tony wasn't anticipating an answer so hearing FRIDAY say one surprised him. "What?"

*"Mysterio's real name is Beck. You told May that and Peter said it during the video."*

And now that FRIDAY mentioned it, Tony remembered Mysterio introducing himself to him, telling Tony his name.

*"My name's Beck and there is no secret reason as to why I'm hanging out with Peter. He's a good kid and I like him. Because of that, I want to patrol with him, just to make sure he's safe."*

Tony had to stop himself from snorting in amusement when he replayed the memory. If Mysterio wanted to make sure that Peter was okay, why was Peter's vitals all over the place at that very moment? He shook those thoughts away. Now was not the time for that. He had a mission to complete.

"Step one accomplished," Tony said. "Alright, FRI, pull up everything you know about the name 'Beck.' Use the footage of Beck to help with narrowing it down."

*"Scanning."*

While FRIDAY was doing that, Tony took a moment to look around the lab he was sitting in. It was a mess. Like the rest of the Tower, dust had settled on every square inch of the room. Pages were scattered on some tables, remnants of old and forgotten projects. Tony walked over to one page, curious as to why he had abandoned projects. It wasn't like him to do so. The answer greeted him when he saw just the first word of the title.

*Spider-Man.*

Tony looked up suddenly, his breath quickening as he remembered what had led up to him leaving the Tower.

He had told the press different reasons, ranging from he hated living in cities to he didn't want to raise his daughter in the city. While they were true, none were the actual reason. No, that reason was tied to Peter's death.

After coming back from space, everything about New York had reminded him of Peter. The restaurant just a couple of blocks away was where he and Peter would order dinner from after a long day of working in the lab. That bank a few buildings away was where he and Peter had stopped their first robbery together. It was also the first time they had ever patrolled together and the first crime Peter had stopped outside of Queens. Each street had some sort of touch of Peter, a constant reminder of the kid Tony had failed.

And those reminders had been the strongest in the Tower. Two days a week, Peter would come in for his internship. They would work in the lab for hours, either messing around or actually working on a project. Those projects would either be for SI or for their superhero suits. Sometimes, they never did go to the lab, opting instead for watching a movie--usually *Star Wars*--or playing a game with Pepper (one time, they had decided to play *Monopoly*. That one had quickly turned out to be a bad idea, though, largely due to the fact that Pepper was the CEO of one of the largest companies in the world. The game was quickly banned and hadn't been touched since). Peter would also stay in the Tower every other weekend, spending that entire time with Tony. After Titan, simply looking at the Tower was enough to send Tony spiraling into a dark, dark hole filled with the guilt he had of losing Peter. Because it really had all come down to Tony's fault.

Which was why the lake house was quickly bought and the Penthouse in the Tower was abandoned. And also the reason as to why papers belonging to a certain spider-kid were abandoned. Tony hadn't had the heart to throw them away. Throwing them away felt like accepting Peter's death; accepting that he was truly and really gone. Throwing them away felt like letting Peter go, and Tony wasn't prepared to do that and he felt like he would never be ready to do that. He also didn't want to finish the projects without Peter, fearful that the kid would hate him if he did so. Except, there was one project that Tony had worked on; one project which was associated with Spider-Man.

A few months after Peter's death and a few weeks after moving away from the city, May had come up to visit Tony. In her hands were Peter's old chemistry notebooks. Seeing the familiar scrawl of Peter's handwriting had brought up images of a ruined planet, a dying boy in his hands. But Pepper's firm touch on his shoulder had recentered Tony, bringing Tony up out of the sea of memories best left forgotten.

May had given those notebooks to Tony, saying that she didn't know what else to do with them. Tony had frowned at that, but had realized what she had meant when she flipped to the back of the notebooks. The notebooks were not just Peter's old chemistry notes, but his Spider-Man notes.

After Tony had flipped through a few pages of the notebook May had opened--which was from Peter's sophomore year and contained page after page of notes on Peter's web fluid--May had spoken. "I didn't want to throw them away," she had said, telling him that she was as loath as Tony was when it came to throwing Peter's things away. "But I want to do something with it."

Tony had frowned. "Like what?"

May had looked away. When she had turned back around, tears were forming in her eyes. "Peter was an amazing kid, Tony. He was so selfless, so willing to help everyone and anyone. I knew that, someday, he would do great and amazing things. But, that day never came for him. So, when I was looking at his Spider-Man notes, I realized something. Spider-Man was something Peter was so passionate about. I know that if Peter had the option of only one thing to leave behind--a legacy, if you will--it would have something to do with Spider-Man. And I knew that he loved helping people, so I was wondering if there's any way to repurpose the formula. Use his webs for something else; something that would still help other people. And create a way for the world to know how incredible our kid was."

Tony had blinked the tears away from his eyes. What May had said had resonated with him. Peter had died way too soon and had yet to grow into the potential he had. If Tony was able to show the world just how amazing Peter Parker was--outside of revealing the kid's identity--he would gladly do so.

So, he had kept the notebooks. He had worked on it haphazardly, as much as his emotions had allowed him. Some days--which were most days, if he was being honest--he couldn't bear seeing the kid's handwriting or trying to work on building a legacy for a person that had departed the world too soon. The mere thought that he was working on something dealing with Spider-Man without Peter was too much for Tony on those days.

Other days, though, he had found tremendous joy in the work. He knew that the kid would love the idea of using his formula for something other than Spider-Man, yet still doing good work for the world. The thought that what he was doing was fully supported by Peter was enough for him to keep reading.

While Tony had insisted that he would never let go of the kid who had meant so much to him, Webacy--as he had begun to call the project, a combination of the words "web" and "legacy"--became a way for Tony to let Peter go. To accept his death and start to move on. To start healing and forgive himself. Over the course of the five years Peter was gone, Tony had copied Peter's notes onto a word document, which was synced with FRIDAY. Tony had also come up with an idea for a situation the webs would be perfect in, which he had written down on the last page of Peter's notebook from sophomore year: Using the webs in a medical situation. The webs were extremely strong and could stick to most surfaces, including skin. If he could figure out how to use them as bandages and prove why they were better than regular bandages, Peter's work would be remembered for years to come. Peter's work would be used for a reason other than Spider-Man, but still for a reason associated with helping people. And Tony had known, without a shadow of a doubt, that Peter himself would be completely supportive of the repurposing.

Of course, the project had been pushed aside the moment Steve and Lang had appeared on his doorstep with the words "We can bring them back." The project had all but left Tony's head when he was met with the possibility that Peter could come back.

And come back he did. When Tony had hugged Peter in the middle of the Compound Battle, he had found himself thanking the universe for letting him bring back his kid. After the crap life the universe had dealt him, he was beyond grateful that it had granted him one thing that brought him immense happiness: Peter.

But the project had stayed out of Tony's mind since Peter had come back. He had meant to show Webacy to Peter, but had forgotten to in the wake of happiness Peter had brought. So, it had stayed in FRIDAY's drive and the notebook had sat in a drawer in the lake house's lab, completely forgotten.

Until now, that is. And, with the memories of Webacy, came other memories. Such as one that had occurred during one of Peter's intern days.

Tony and Peter had been in the lab, working on Peter's suit. The night before, Peter had ripped one of the arms, a fact that he was extremely upset about. Peter had claimed that it was just worn from being used so frequently, but Tony had seen the way Peter was favoring his arm--the same arm as the arm that was ripped, funny enough--and the blood surrounding the rip. Tony didn't comment on it, however, seeing how little blood there was and it didn't seem life-threatening enough for Karen to have alerted Tony about it when the injury had occurred. Still, he had made a mental reminder to add to Karen's protocols, deciding that Karen should tell him of any injuries that

occured, even those that were as small as a papercut.

Tony had needed to grab thread to sew the ripped section together. Originally, he had tried to convince Peter of letting him build a brand new suit for him, but Peter had looked horrified at the idea.

“You don’t have to go through all that trouble, Mr. Stark,” Peter had said, clearly thinking that it would’ve been a massive headache for Tony.

Tony had simply laughed. “All that trouble? Kid, I build suits for fun. It wouldn’t be any trouble at all.” And it really wouldn’t have been.

Still, Peter had stubbornly shook his head. “I’m fine with just a simple stitch. I don’t need all of that.”

“Shame,” Tony had tsked. “It would’ve been so much fun. We could’ve messed with the colors.”

Peter’s face had wrinkled in confusion. “The colors? What’s wrong with the colors?”

“Nothing, per se,” Tony had replied. “Just, don’t you find it boring after a while?”

Peter had raised his eyebrow. “Says the guy that has been rocking red and gold since ‘08.”

Tony had placed a hand on his heart. “Ouch, Pete, that stings.”

Peter had smirked, telling Tony that had been his intention all along.

“Anyways,” Tony had said. “What do you think about black?”

Peter’s face had wrinkled in disgust. “Ew, why black?”

“Well, you and Natasha have a spider thing going, what with you guys’ names, Black Widow and Spider-Man.”

“And? I still don’t see why black has anything to do with our ‘spider thing.’” He had made air quotes with his hands on the last two words.

“Well, why not make it complete? Y’know, go with black to match with Nat’s all black suit and her name, *Black* Widow. And, there’s the added fact that most spiders are black, not red and blue.”

Peter had looked up at Tony in shock, causing Tony to give the kid a smirk back.

“Yeah, kid, I’m creative. Give a man credit where credit is due.”

Peter’s shock had quickly disappeared. “For that comment alone, I’m not doing that. Besides, it’ll only make your ego swell, and it does not need that.”

“Eh, I don’t know about that one. So, what do you think about black now that I’ve made my case?”

“I still don’t like it.”

“Then what’s your case against it?”

Peter had begun to fiddle with one of the many pencils scattered on their worktable. “I don’t know.”

Any teasing about Peter's opinion had completely flown out of Tony's mind as he saw the change in Peter's demeanor. "C'mon, kid, you can tell me."

Peter's face had flushed in embarrassment. "It's stupid," he had mumbled, almost too quiet for Tony to hear.

"Nothing you say is stupid, kid," Tony had said, stepping closer to Peter.

"I went with red because it's similar to your suit."

Tony had blinked in shock. While he knew that there was a time Peter had only seen him as Iron Man, not the human behind the armor, it still surprised him to know that he was the inspiration behind Peter's color scheme.

"And the blue is for Captain America."

Tony had winced at the name slightly before calming his features. The events at Siberia had happened four months ago, yet it was still a sore subject for him. Still, he pushed those thoughts aside. While he might have his own opinions about Captain America, it was unfair to project those opinions onto the kid. "So your color scheme was based on inspiration from your childhood idols?"

Peter had continued fiddling with the pencil. "Yeah."

"Well, kid, I'm honored," Tony had said, meaning every word. "I think it's great that my actions had influenced you months before you met me."

Peter had looked up, a small smile forming on his face. "Yeah?"

"Yeah." Tony had turned away and started to walk towards where he kept the red thread. However, he had paused before getting there. "Of course, you could've gone with black and said it was inspired by your childhood movies." He paused before explaining what he meant. "Y'know, Darth Vader from *Star Wars* ." Tony didn't even have to wait long for Peter's reply.

"Mr. Stark!" Peter had shouted, making Tony smile. Peter, however, couldn't see his smile, as Tony was still turned away from him. "I'm not--and I will never--go with black for a suit color!"

Tony pulled himself out of his memories, realizing with a jolt that Peter was wrong. Peter had, in fact, gone with a black suit. Yet another thing to add to the list of things that were different with Peter thanks to Beck's influence. Which reminded Tony of what FRIDAY was currently doing.

"How are we going with that scan, FRI?"

*"Scan complete. I have also pulled up all the information that I deemed important for you to know."*

"Good girl, FRIDAY," Tony said walking back over to the main table. "Pull it up for me."

FRIDAY's information appeared in holographic screens on the table in front of Tony. He started to read the first page of information, briefly scanning through it. He was only on the second line when something caught his eye.

**NAME:** *Quentin Beck*

**JOB:** *N/A; Formerly worked at Stark Industries*

So that was why Beck had seemed so familiar; he had worked at SI.



“FRI, pull up the sheet documenting Beck’s work at SI.”

After a moment of the holographic screens flying every which way, the AI stopped at one sheet. “Done.” Tony began to read it.

*Shortly before his expulsion from the company, Beck was the developer of Binarily Augmented Retro-Framing, or BARF. BARF is a holographic illusion technology that has tremendous power, as a weapon or for therapeutic pursuits. Tony Stark, owner of Stark Industries, made the executive decision to use BARF as a form of therapy. The technology relies on a complex holographic system that connects with the user's hippocampus. The connection allows the program to find a certain traumatic memory, alter it, and project it onto an external infrastructure. Through the altered projection, the user is able to re-experience and work through overcoming traumatic experiences. BARF was announced to the public on May 3, 2016, at a MIT commencement speech made by Stark. BARF has never quite reached the potential its creators saw for it, due to the large cost of building the program (an estimated \$611 million) and the public backlash against the Avengers (a group of powerful superheroes; a group Stark himself is a part of) at the time of BARF's release. This backlash was be--*

Tony stopped reading, deciding that the subsequent information was unnecessary. Besides, he knew what the page was about to talk about. The page had reminded Tony of how he knew Beck; of what he had thought about the program he had created; of why he was fired by SI.

Beck had been interested in using the holograms the technology created as a weapon. And Tony would have been lying if he said that Beck’s goal was impossible. BARF could be used to make neurological weapons, and Tony knew from experience--the memory of Wanda’s illusions that she had used against him filled his head--just how effective those weapons could be. However, Tony had gotten rid of the weapons manufacturing division years prior. Meaning SI had no need nor desire to use BARF as a weapon. So, Tony had decided to change BARF into a therapy program.

But, Beck was not happy about it. He was one of the first people on the project that voiced his resentment and also the first to comment on the horrible acronym Tony had decided upon. Yes, Tony could admit that the name wasn’t any near perfect and could use some tweaking, but no one had voiced any other options for a name--including Beck himself, the loudest voice there was against the name. With those two opposing views, Beck’s resentment against Tony and SI itself began to grow. In fact, it grew so much that it bordered on insanity. So great was his resentment, Tony had been forced to fire Beck.

“You’ll pay for this!” Beck had shouted as he voluntarily left his office at SI. Well, not voluntarily. Tony had been forced to call Happy in to escort the man out. “You haven’t seen the last of me!”

Tony had simply shrugged Beck’s words off, not believing a word. However, it seemed that he should’ve been more vigilant. Beck was back; back to make his promise true. And he knew the best way to get back at Tony was by using the people Tony loved. And he had used Peter. Everyone knew that Spider-Man and Iron Man were good friends. After all, Tony had admitted that he had built the kid’s suit and had invited him to the fight in Germany against the Rogue Avengers--a fight he still regretted to this day. Tony and Peter’s relationship could also be seen in the patrols they did around the city. Before the Blip, Tony would spend one evening a month going on patrol with the kid. Usually, it was pretty boring, making Tony wonder why Peter loved being Spider-Man, but, sometimes, there was some excitement--like a bank robbery.

Beck had probably been waiting in the wings for the past seven years, waiting for the perfect

moment to strike. He had noticed Spider-Man and Tony's close relationship and decided to target it, first befriending the kid, then sowing seeds of discord between Tony and Peter, and, finally, using those seeds to destroy their relationship. He had also used those seeds to convince Peter to accept the symbiote. Beck was doing all of that, just to hurt Tony.

Tony was the cause of this villain, just as he was responsible for Ultron. He groaned, remembering that Peter's past arch-nemesis, Vulture, was also on that list. He didn't clean up as well as he could've, leading to Toomes taking possession of alien tech and using it to become Vulture. Tony always, consistently, failed Peter in some way.

But now was not the time for self-hatred. Tony could fix this mess, but he needed to stay present and focused. He couldn't lose himself in his memories.

"Step two complete," Tony said. "We've discovered who Mysterio is and figured out a motivation for him. Now, how does his past contribute to the new goal of finding where Peter is?"

*"It doesn't, boss,"* FRIDAY replied.

Tony waved his hand, dismissing his AI's words. "Don't be such a pessimist, FRI." He stared at the paused video, thinking hard. After a couple of seconds deep in thought, he finally admitted defeat. It seemed that FRIDAY was correct; there was no connection between Beck's motivation and Peter's location. The only thing that Tony had that could help him was CCTV footage, but FRIDAY had stated that there was no footage of Peter since last Tuesday--a fact that left Tony very confused.

"Are you sure that this video is the last footage of him?" Tony asked.

*"Yes, boss."*

Tony suddenly remembered something. "Footage means pictures, too, FRI. I don't discriminate."

Tony could hear the eye-roll in the AI's reply. *"Yes, boss. As I have previously stated, this video was the last time Peter is caught on camera, whether in a video or a picture."*

"Then what on earth happened to the video May showed me that showed Peter's new suit? Or the picture that showed Peter and Beck buying hot dogs?"

*"It is not there anymore."*

Tony frowned. Was it deleted? If so, why? "Pull up the Spidey\_Watch twitter account," Tony said, remembering that that was where the video and picture were from.

*"I can't find it,"* FRIDAY said.

Tony's frown grew deeper. He brought his own phone out and opened twitter. Sure enough, when he searched up the twitter account, he was met with no results. "What the hell?" Tony muttered. "FRI, call May."

She answered on the first ring. *"Tony?"*

"Yep. Look, can you pull up the Spidey\_Watch account?"

After a couple of moments came May's confused reply. *"I'm getting an error message. It's not there."*

“Dammit. Okay, I gotta go now.”

“To--” May started to say, but was cut off by Tony ending the call.

Tony ran his hands through his hair, desperately trying to figure out what was happening. Why was the account deleted? Why was that video the last footage of Peter? Why was the previous video and picture of Peter deleted? The three questions had to be connected in some way; years of coincidences had taught Tony that there was no such thing as coincidences. Everything happened for a reason; a reason that seemed to benefit the villains more than it benefited Tony. And the reason had just hit Tony in the face.

Beck had to be the one to delete the account. He had somehow deleted all past footage of Peter and was deleting current footage of Peter. Beck was trying to get to Tony and he knew that the best way to do so was by using the people Tony loved the most. And the person he had chosen was Peter. And, in order to make sure that Tony knew, Beck had left this last footage to show Tony how he had failed Peter. This was yet another step in Beck’s plan of revenge.

And it was hurting Tony knowing that the kid was put in the middle of it. Why did Peter need to get involved with it? Because Beck knew that hurting Peter would hurt Tony more than his own suffering. Tony should’ve stayed away from Peter. He should’ve never met him; should’ve never invited him to Germany. He should’ve--

But this was Peter he was talking about. Peter, the kid who brightened his day by just existing. Peter, the kid who had made the world feel more hopeful after Siberia. Peter, the kid who had shown him that he wanted to have a kid to call his own. Peter, the kid whose death had been one of the darkest events in Tony’s life. Peter, the kid whose resurrection had brought him so much joy.

Did he really want all that to disappear? Did he really wish that all those happy moments--and sad moments--never happened?

No, he didn’t. Yet when he thought of how much Peter was suffering because of Tony; it really made him wish that was so.

Because if Peter never met him, would he have ever gotten involved with Beck? Would he have ever died on Titan? Would he have ever fought Vulture? Peter would’ve lived a blissful life, without Tony. Because all Tony did was bring bad luck and sadness everywhere he went.

Peter, though, he only ever brought good luck and happiness with him. Without Tony’s corruption, he could’ve lived a life filled with that good luck and happiness. But he didn’t, thanks to Tony. It was always Tony’s fault. Always; constantly. Just like everything else in Tony’s life. Memories began playing in Tony’s mind--uninvited, yet true.

*“Mr. Stark?” a voice asked--a voice that Tony knew. But, no, it couldn’t be him. “I don’t feel so good.”*

*Tony turned around, his heart dropping to his stomach as he saw that it was who he thought it was; Peter was the one speaking. He was holding his stomach and his face was filled with pain--for a reason that Tony was desperately wishing wasn’t what he was thinking it was. “Kid?”*

*Peter’s pained expression increased, making Tony’s heart drop further and further. Peter looked down at his hands, his face suddenly changing to one of fear as he noticed a flake of dust floating off of one of them. “I-I don’t know what’s happening.”*

*Tony did. And, God, how he wished he didn’t. How he wished that this wasn’t happening. Because*

*it couldn't be. A world without Pe--no, it wasn't happening. "You're going to be alright, kid." Because he was. Tony was going to make certain of that.*

*Peter quickly looked up, his wide-eyed expression meeting Tony's. He stumbled forward, the fear and pain in his face increasing tenfold with every millisecond that passed. Tony felt his heart beating out of control; felt his own fear increasing tenfold every millisecond he had to watch his kid (his kid? When did that happen?) suffer. And it only grew worse as he realized that there was nothing he could do to stop the fear and pain Peter was experiencing right now. He was as helpless as a baby bird is when it falls out of its nest; desperate to stop its fall, but lacking the ability to.*

*Peter latched onto Tony, his grip tight (Tony ignored how it grew weaker the longer Peter held on) around Tony. "I don't want to go."*

*Tony held Peter back, holding him tight to his chest. I don't want to let you go either, kid, he thought. But his words never made it to his lips as Peter continued talking.*

*"Please. I don't want to go. I don't want to go. I don't want to go, please, sir. I don't want to go. Please, sir, I don't want to go."*

*Peter's legs suddenly collapsed underneath him. Tony fell with him, the two of them ending up on the ground. Tony glanced down to where Peter's legs were, and he suddenly wished that he didn't. Where Peter's legs were supposed to be, was nothing. Nothing but dust. He looked back at Peter's face, tears blurring his vision as he did so.*

*Peter's eyes met Tony's before he spoke the words that would go on to fuel Tony's nightmares for the next five years. "I'm sorry."*

*"Don't apologize, Pete."* That was what he had said when Peter had apologized to Beck about rambling excitedly about the symbiote. And he was thinking it again as he came out of the memory.

Peter shouldn't have apologized when he died. Nor should he ever apologize for anything. Because it was never his fault. Never, never, never. It was Tony's fault. He was the one who had given Peter the suit, encouraging him to be Spider-Man. He was the one to convince May about Peter going out as a vigilante, the one who encouraged her to let her nephew dance with Death time and time again. It was only a matter of time before Peter died. And he did so and his death was on Tony's hands. Just like the death of Yinsen. Just like the death of hundreds of nameless people who had died during the attack on New York in 2012. Just like the death of hundreds of people who had died in Sokovia, including Miriam Sharpe's son. Just like the death of Vision. Just like the death of Natasha.

Guilt and grief was welling up inside of Tony, making it hard to notice anything else. He definitely didn't notice that he was currently curled up in a ball on the floor of his lab, his arms hugging himself as sob after sob racked through him. He sure as hell didn't notice the elevator whirring, its doors opening to admit Pepper. She didn't waste a single second before rushing to his side, crouching so she was next to him.

"Tony?" she said, her voice sounding so very far away to Tony. "Tony, can you hear me?"

He didn't respond, too caught up in his guilt and grief to do so. Everything was his fault. Everything was his fault. *Everything was his--*

"Tony, nothing is your fault," Pepper said, her voice as calm as the sound of waves crashing on the

cliffs next to his old Malibu house. That had been destroyed. Because of Tony. Because everything was his fault.

“Tony, listen to me,” Pepper said, breaking into Tony’s mantra as quickly as Peter had broken into Tony’s walls. Walls that Tony had built to ensure that no one got close enough to him. Because he failed every single person that had gotten close to him. “Nothing is your fault. You did not fail anyone.”

Tony found his voice, though it was broken and quiet, so unlike his normal voice. “How can you be so sure?”

“Because I have known you for over twenty years, Tony. Because I married you. I know you, inside and out, and I know that you have never, not once, failed anyone.”

“But I did,” Tony said, sitting up. “I was blind to Peter’s suffering, and now he’s off prancing around the city with a former, unstable employee of mine. Who’s, by the way, harming Peter, because of me. Because he hates me since I--”

“Tony, his motivations for being a villain have nothing to do with you.”

“Lies.”

Pepper’s eyebrow raised. “Did you just call me a liar?”

Tony quickly backtracked. “No, no, I didn’t. You wouldn’t lie, not to me.”

“If I wouldn’t lie, then maybe that means what I’m saying is the truth. Whatever is happening to Peter right now is not your fault. You only have control over your actions, meaning you are only responsible for your own actions. This situation right now--what is currently happening right now--is not your work. No, it’s the work of an unstable villain, whose only goal in life is the destruction of other people. Nothing you have done, in the past or the present, has helped, in any way, this villain’s actions.”

“But, Pep--”

“Nope,” Pepper interrupted, holding up a hand to stop him. “There’s no ‘but.’”

“Normally, I would agree with you,” Tony said. The word typically signified that Tony’s ideas were impossible; a sentiment that Tony was against. Nothing was impossible. Not to him. “But, in this--”

“Nope,” Pepper cut him off again. “What did I just say?”

“Pepper, Beck is a former worker at SI. Who I fired. He’s been harboring a grudge against me ever since and, now, he’s using Peter to get back at me. Tell me, how is that not my fault?”

Pepper stared thoughtfully at Tony before replying. “Tony, I’ve already answered this question. Beck might have been holding a grudge against you, but he decided to act on that grudge. You had nothing to do with his actions; nothing at all. So you are not allowed to feel guilty for Beck’s actions; only he does.”

“But I could’ve fixed it. He was able to do so much harm because I wasn’t there for Peter. I was blind to how he was hurting and--”

“Do you really believe that?” Pepper asked.

Tony blinked at her. "There's nothing to believe, Pep. It's the truth."

"If it's the truth, then why did you invite him to our house? Why were you staring at your phone all morning, waiting on pins and needles for Peter's response? Why did you fly here, all the way from our house, as soon as May told you that Peter needed you? If you weren't there for him, then I don't know what it means to be present for someone. If you were blind to his hurt, then I don't know what it means to see clearly."

"Tony, I get that looking back allows you to see all the different ways that you went wrong, but it doesn't allow you to have grace. You are human. You are not omniscient. No one expects you to see Peter's internal hurt. So don't expect yourself to."

Tony stared at Pepper before chuckling. Pepper's words were the exact words that he needed to hear--and it was scary to see that she knew what needed to be said. He looked away, a hand running through his hair. "Man, Pep, how do you do that?"

Pepper simply gave him a small smile. "Maybe because I just had the same conversation, with both May and Happy."

Tony gave a small sigh. "We're a mess, aren't we?"

Pepper shrugged. "That might be so, but there is one difference between you and them."

Tony raised an eyebrow, prompting her to explain.

"You're my mess." She leaned in, giving him a quick kiss on his forehead. She stood up, offering a hand to help Tony up, who took it.

"Where did you come from?" Tony asked. "And how did you manage to get here when I needed you the most?"

Pepper brushed her hair out of her face. "Well, I picked Morgan up from preschool when it let out. We went home, but, shortly after our arrival, I decided to head into the city. I was worried when you told me that Peter had skipped school and you said you were heading into the city to check on him. But, you never followed up on what was happening"--Tony ran a hand over his forehead. He should've called Pepper right after his argument with Peter; she had every right to know what was happening--"so I decided to head down myself. I went to May's and she filled me in on what was happening. Then, you called her with no context whatsoever"--Tony sighed again. He vaguely remembered that call and how cryptic he was with his question--"So I figured I would come to see you. I left Morgan with May."

"I'm sorry," Tony said. "I should've--"

"Should've, could've, would've," Pepper interrupted. "Stop apologizing for what you didn't do. You had a lot on your mind and I would rather you focus your attention on helping Peter, not keeping me in the loop."

"But--"

"Stop," Pepper said. "The ban is still in effect."

Tony chuckled. "Till when?"

"The end of time."

Tony smiled, but the smile quickly fell when he turned his attention back to the table in front of him. He leaned against it, sighing heavily. “What do I do, Pepper?” The video was still up, the rewind button in the middle of the frame, begging Tony to replay it and watch his fail--no, watch Beck’s actions again. FRIDAY’s information about Beck was still scattered on holographic screens. And, beneath the screens, laid pencils and old projects of Peter’s.

“Let’s help Peter.”

Tony sighed, glancing at the video of Beck and Peter. “Already tried that. There’s nothing. His tracker isn’t working and FRIDAY said that he isn’t appearing on any camera. If I don’t know his location, then I can’t help him.”

Pepper frowned. “There’s no footage of him?”

“Nada. Even past footage of him was deleted.” Tony gestured towards the video. “Save this video from last week.”

“How? May mentioned that the Spidey\_Watch account was deleted, but how?”

“Hell if I know,” Tony said. “Beck did something, I’m positive. He’s behind the current lack of footage of Peter, too.”

“Well, he can’t erase present footage of Peter, right?”

Tony gave Pepper a confused look. “What?”

“I mean, he can’t erase a video that’s in the process of being made, right?”

Tony blinked, trying to understand what Pepper was saying. Suddenly, it hit him. Pepper was asking about live footage, a camera that was recording when it caught Peter. “Pepper, he’s doing that. He’s taken the CCTV cameras around the city and is erasing everything with Peter’s face.”

“And since you hacked them, that’s a security system that can be easily hacked, right?”

“Yes, but--” he cut off quickly, realizing what Pepper had said. “Wait, was that a back-hand--”

“What about a system that Beck doesn’t have access to? A recording system that he’s not even aware exists?”

“Like any of my tech. My God, Pep, you’re a genius.”

She smiled slyly at him. “You’re just now realizing that?”

But Tony’s mind was moving too quickly to pick up on her words. He began pulling up the screens around him, opening and closing them faster than Morgan changed her mind. “If I set up cameras around the city...I’ll have to place them in Queens, since that’s the...but that’s so large... I’ll need hundreds of cameras, one on every street...but where can I find that many cameras...” His voice trailed off as he tried to come up with an idea.

Pepper, somehow, had kept up with his muttering. “What about the Stark phones and tablets? Those all have cameras on them, right? You can hook up their footage with FRIDAY and get all of their recordings here.”

But Tony was already shaking his head. “People will notice those and start wondering why Iron Man’s putting cameras everywhere. People will talk and Beck will notice. I need something that

can't be noticed, by people or Beck. Something like...EDITH."

Ignoring Pepper's confused questions, Tony hurried to open up a new holographic screen, this one with commands for the Iron Legion. EDITH was currently in a drawer in his lab--the lab at the lake house. He waited impatiently as the screen loaded then, after waiting half a second, he decided that it was moving too slowly for him. "FRIDAY, I need you to send a suit here, with EDITH."

"Yes, boss."

"And I need it soon. I don't care if you have to break the damn sound barrier to get here, just bring me EDITH as fast as you can."

"EDITH is already on her way here, boss."

"ETA?"

"Thirty minutes."

"FRI, what did I just tell you? I need you here, now. I want that time cut in half."

There was silence from FRIDAY. "Yes, boss," she replied. "ETA is now in sixteen minutes."

That still wasn't what he asked for, but it would have to do. He leaned over the side of the table and gave a sigh, releasing the breath he hadn't realized that he had been holding. It was at that moment that he realized Pepper had been trying to get his attention for the past couple of minutes.

"--ny, tell me what you're talking about right now."

Tony pushed away from the table and turned around to face her. "EDITH can give me access to--"

"And what is EDITH?"

Tony sighed, trying to collect his thoughts enough to give her a response. It was difficult, seeing as his mind was trying to put all of its power into helping Peter, not in building an explanation for Pepper.

"A few years ago--around the same time as BARF, actually--I developed a new AI system, named EDITH. EDITH is an augmented reality security, defense, and artificial tactical intelligence system, and has access to SI's global satellite network. It has tons of power; can hack anything--even Stark tech--and has access to missiles. Best of all, it has access to drones. That have cameras attached to them. And, even better, can cloak themselves. Which--"

"Which is exactly what we need," Pepper finished. "But, why did you name it EDITH?"

Pepper knew very well that each of his AI's names were acronyms. JARVIS stood for "Just A Rather Very Intelligent System." FRIDAY stood for "Female Replacement Intelligent Digital Assistant Youth." EDITH, of course, was no exception. Tony closed his eyes, preparing his words. After a few moments, he reopened them. "For a while, she didn't have a name," he began. "And then I solved time travel.

"When I had discovered that I could actually bring Peter back, I didn't know what to do with myself. I had failed him and then I had the chance to undo that. To have him hanging out with me, joking and helping me with various projects. To live in a world where Peter Parker was alive. And then I realized that there was a very real chance that I won't be in that world.



“I thought back to every big fight the Avengers had ever faced and, in each one, I can pinpoint the times that I should’ve died. In New York, I flew into a wormhole, carrying a nuke in my hands. I saw it explode, Pep. I saw it fly into that alien stronghold and blast it apart. I should’ve died. Anyone that close should be dead.

“But I wasn’t. I woke back up on the streets of New York, alive and healthy. Albeit with some PTSD, but who doesn’t when they work in my line of work? I then remembered what happened the last time we went toe to toe with Thanos and there were countless times that I should’ve died. Thanos stabbed me, how did I survive that? I then spent twenty-two days on a broken spaceship, floating aimlessly through space. How come I didn’t die then? How did I come home to you, when Peter never made it back to his aunt?

“Then, I remembered Strange’s words from Titan. He said that he saw 14,000,605 different futures. Then, he said that there was only one where we won. Only one where we came out on top. When everyone started turning into dust, I figured that we didn’t win. Our outcome was one of the 14,000,604 possibilities where the Avengers lost. But you want to know what Strange’s last words were? Before he turned into dust? ‘There was no other way.’ ‘*There was no other way.*’

“In the five years after his death, I turned those words over and over again in my mind. ‘There was no other way.’ I sure as hell thought that there was. There had to be another way, a way where we won and I held my kid again. So why would he say that? Why would Strange claim that ‘there was no other way’?

“Then, I remembered how he had saved my life. You remember how I said that Thanos stabbed me? Well, he could’ve hurt me worse than that. I could’ve died right then and there, but Strange stopped him. Strange gave him the Time Stone, saving my life. It struck me as odd, because of what he told me when he introduced himself to me.

“You see, when Pete and I first met the guy, one of the first things he told me was that, if it came down to saving Pete and I or the universe, he would choose the universe. So why did the man give Thanos the Time Stone, when doing so would go against his promise to me? Why did he save me, not the universe?

“Because it only seemed that way. In actuality, he did save the universe. Saving the universe didn’t fit the same definition as it did to me on Titan. Saving it didn’t mean stopping Thanos from Snapping. No, it meant undoing what he had done.

“And I was the one who figured out how to do that. I was the one who solved time travel. I was essential to saving the universe, so Strange saved my life. I didn’t die out there in space and I came home to you, just so I could save the universe later. I flirted with Death time and time again, yet I never met him. Why? So that I could get to the whole reason for my existence: Solving time travel and bringing everyone back. And if my whole life had led to that point, what was going to happen to me afterwards? What was gonna be the point of my life after bringing everyone back?

“Don’t get me wrong; I didn’t want to leave. I had you and Morgan and Peter was about to be back. But I had met my superhero quota. I realized that after Peter came back, I would finally be able to rest. Finally be able to look in the mirror and feel accomplished. Feel like I really, really did something that I was proud of.

“And if that was my mindset, how was I gonna get out of the situation alive? If I was finally accepting--even allowing--my death, then I shouldn’t expect anything less. I came to terms with the fact that there would be a world where Peter was alive, but I wasn’t. And I was okay with that. But I knew Peter wouldn’t.

“Peter would’ve been furious with me. After everything he experienced, all the people he had lost-- he wouldn’t want me to leave. And I understood that. So I knew I had to do something, at least for him.

“So I picked a name for my AI: Even Dead, I’m The Hero. Or, EDITH. I have a pair of sunglasses that FRIDAY was attached to. I kicked her out of it and put in EDITH. And, in my will, I gave it to Peter. I gave it to him so that, even after my death, he would still feel like I’m next to him, mentoring him. So that he could carry a little piece of me, whenever he was out being a hero.”

Silence followed Tony’s words. Then, almost sounding hesitant, Pepper asked, “You gave a very powerful piece of equipment to a sixteen-year-old kid from Queens?”

Tony winced. “When you say it like that, it makes me sound so negligent. Like I’m handing over a powerful weapon to a random stranger off the streets.”

“Sorry, that’s not what I meant,” Pepper said, hurrying to correct herself. “It just sounds so unlike you. You don’t trust people that easily, for understandable reasons. First, you had the Stane fallout and then the whole thing with Steve. It shocks me that you would be able to trust a kid who you had only known for a year and a half with one of your most powerful weapons. I mean, Tony, this AI has access to missiles. It has the ability to destroy entire countries, and you gave it to Peter?”

“Because of who he is, Pepper! I knew he would--”

“Tony, I get that. He wouldn’t hurt a fly. What I’m getting at is the fact that you trusted him enough to give it to him. After only knowing him for fourteen months. Fourteen months. Did you know that it took you twenty-eight months before you gave me permission to be in your private lab? It took you over two years to give me permission to be in one of your private areas, yet it took you half that to give Peter EDITH. Why?”

Millions of answers ran through Tony’s head, yet only one found itself on Tony’s lips. Only one was spoken out loud. “Because he was the only thing that I didn’t make a mistake about.”

Pepper blinked, clearly not understanding Tony’s words. He hurried to explain himself.

“I’ve made a lot of mistakes in my lifetime, Pepper. Too many to count. Yet I never second guessed myself when it came to Peter. Sure, there were plenty of times where I found myself questioning why I decided to invite a fourteen-year-old to fight Captain America, yet I never did question why I gave him the suit. Why I offered for him to be an Avenger. Why I gave him an actual internship with me. Not once. And when it came to trusting him enough with EDITH, I knew that the kid was trustworthy. I knew that he could be trusted. And that was yet another thing about Peter that I have never questioned.”

“Tony...” Pepper started to say, but Tony wasn’t done talking.

“After I Snapped, I sat on the ground, debating whether I should let myself go. I was met with two paths. One where I stayed or one where I moved on. And I almost left, Pepper. And I was okay with leaving. You even told me that it was okay to go. You said that you were going to be okay. For a moment, I didn’t believe you. How could you be okay? Who would protect you from other aliens, other villains with a vendetta against me? Who would protect the rest of the world?

“But then I saw Peter standing behind you. For other people, the sight of their son sobbing would’ve brought them to staying, but not me. Because that’s not what I saw. No, I saw Peter Parker, the person who I did the impossible for. The person who I brought back from the dead. The person who is more than capable of protecting you. Of protecting the rest of the world. No, the rest

of the *universe*. I wasn't expecting him to do it right then. No, I figured that he would save the world one day. But even knowing that one day he would do that, I still knew that it would be okay if I slipped on.

"And slip on I did. One moment, all I felt was the pain of staving off unconsciousness and the next, nothing. I didn't feel any pain and I couldn't see anything either, save for a light way off in the distance. I started to make my way towards it, thinking that I was about to see my mom again; about to see Natasha again. But then, I stopped. I still don't know why, but I stopped moving. I then began to hear voices, ones that I couldn't place.

"One asked, 'Are you going to take over the Avengers?' Another asked, 'What are you going to do if the aliens come back?' And then I heard Pete's voice. 'Is there any neighborhood questions?' They faded away after that, to the point where I couldn't make out any more of their questions. I was confused as to why I was hearing Peter's voice, because, last I checked, he was still alive. And I had other questions, too. Like, who did the other voices belong to? Why were they asking those questions? Suddenly, Peter's voice returned and it answered my questions.

"'I just really miss him,' he said. 'Everywhere I go, I see his face. And the whole world is asking me who's gonna be the next Iron Man and I don't know if that's me. I'm not Iron Man.' When I heard him say that, I realized that I was hearing voices from the future. Voices from what would happen after I'm gone. And hearing Peter's voice, breaking in sadness and uncertainty, I began to feel doubtful. I began to wonder if I really should leave.

"No, I wasn't regretting my decision in entrusting the world to Peter. I knew he was ready for it. I was regretting making him grow up too fast. Because I didn't give him EDITH to be the next me. I didn't leave so that he could go and take up the mantle of Iron Man. That's not what I did. I left to make sure he had a world to live in. I left because I knew that, one day--not today and sure as hell not a few weeks ago--one day he would fill into his role as an Avenger.

"And I thought that he knew that. Because he's the one that taught me that. After the Vulture incident, I offered for him to be an Avenger. And he turned me down. You wanna know what he said? He said 'I'd rather--'"

"'Stay on the ground. And be a friendly-neighborhood Spider-Man,'" Pepper finished.

Tony smiled before continuing his story. "Yep. And I thought that's what he would do after I left. Then, maybe after high school or college, he would move onto Avengers stuff. But, it seemed that I was wrong. He thought that my death should force him to be an adult right then and there. And then Peter's voice came back and confirmed my theories.

"'Mr. Stark left me a note with those glasses. 'To the next Tony Stark, I trust you.' He knew every mistake I ever made, so he must've known that I was not ready for this. Maybe he didn't trust me enough to have EDITH, maybe he trusted me enough to pick who should.' The thing is, I never left a note with my glasses. Never in my will did I leave a note for Peter. And even if I did, I would never write that on it. I just said that I never expected Peter to be the next me. No, I wanted him to be his own person. Find his own identity that's not attached to mine. And I gave him EDITH because I trusted him. Because I trusted Peter to have her.

"And if Peter didn't know that--if he didn't know that I trusted him enough to have a very powerful weapon; if he didn't know that I never expected him to be the next Iron Man--then I failed him as a mentor. I failed in making sure he was confident enough in his own ability to exist without me. Hell, not only that, I failed him as a parent. Because those five years without him and the four years with Morgan has taught me that that boy is my son and I am his dad. And when I realized that, I knew I had to come back. I had to come back and fix my mistakes as a mentor and as a

parent. So, I did. I came back to a world filled with pain, but I came back to a world with Peter and you and Morgan in it.”

“Did you tell Peter that?” Pepper said. “Have you told him that you solved time travel; that you came back from the dead, for him?”

“No,” Tony answered. “I haven’t gotten the chance to.”

“I think you should. As near as I can figure, this whole thing with Beck stems from the fact that Peter thinks that you don’t care about him. That you only care about Spider-Man. And what you just shared with me proves that his beliefs couldn’t be farther from the truth.”

*“Maybe it’s because Stark has always cared more about Spider-Man than regular-old Peter Parker.”* That was what Beck had said in the video. And, apparently, that was what Peter believed, too. Before he could say anything else, FRIDAY interrupted.

*“EDITH has arrived.”*

Tony spun around as the elevator dinged. It opened to admit one of the suits from the Iron Legion. It had a pair of glasses in its hand--glasses that Tony recognized easily. “Good work, FRI,” he said, quickly stepping up to the suit. He took the glasses and put them on. Instantly, they lit up, EDITH coming online to speak with him.

*“Good evening, Tony,”* she said. Tony instantly got confused. Last he checked, it was early afternoon. He looked at his phone, frowning when he saw that it read 5:32. *“FRIDAY and Karen have informed me of the situation with Peter. How can I be of assistance in the current predicament?”*

“Hey, EDITH,” Tony said. “Here’s what I need you to do.” Tony swiped open a map of New York City on his worktable, telling EDITH to deploy surveillance drones all around Queens. Pepper hurried to his side, helping him decide where the drones should be placed and how many should be in use. Finally, after fifteen minutes of discussion and calling out commands, more than two hundred drones were placed. There was one on every street and one in front of any places where Tony and Pepper had thought a crime could occur. There were drones on rooftops around the city; rooftops frequented by Peter. Karen and FRIDAY helped where they could; Karen the most, seeing as she had worked with Peter for close to two years now and knew his patrols better than anyone else--besides Peter, that is.

“Now we wait,” Tony said, stepping back away from the table. He watched as green dots blinked into existence on the map in front of him--which one indicating a drone.

“Now we wait,” Pepper echoed, slipping an arm around Tony’s waist.

He hugged her back, but still kept his eyes focused on the map. More and more green dots were popping up, reminiscent of ants swarming out of an anthill when attacked. A smile graced his face as he made the comparison. It couldn’t be a more fitting analogy. Beck had attacked Tony when he had given Peter the symbiote, but Tony was sending his own attacks to Beck--only, instead of ants, he was sending EDITH’s drones.

Thanks for reading! I hope you liked it and stay tuned for next week's chapter!

## Chapter Fourteen

### Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday! I'm so excited for No Way Home to come out on Friday!! I hope y'all enjoy this week's chapter and the finale to part four!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### Part Four

*But she'd have nothing left to sell him*

*Tuesday, September 19, 2023*

They didn't have to wait long. An hour later, one of the drones pinged. Tony jumped out of the seat he was sitting in and hurried towards the map, fingers flying across the holographic screens. Pepper rushed out of her own seat to be at Tony's side.

"Which one is it?" Pepper asked.

Tony flipped through the screens, eyes scanning to see which one it was. Finally, he found it. He clicked on it, pulling up its information. "The drone that was set in front of the Bank of America on Junction Boulevard," Tony said, stepping away from the table. "EDITH, send the location to FRIDAY."

"Yes, Tony," EDITH said.

"Once you get the location, FRI, I'll need--"

"Tony..." Pepper said, stopping Tony's directions in its tracks. "I think you need to watch this before you head off."

Tony frowned and turned back around. "Oh my God," he said, under his breath.

Pepper had pulled up the live feed from the drone and what was happening on it was enough for Tony to feel sick. Sure, he had seen his fair share of violence before, but never in conjunction with Peter.

Peter had the black suit on and had his black, snug mask on--the only good part of the entire video. The suit told Tony that the symbiote was the one controlling Peter, not Peter, but that still didn't help in easing his concerns. If anything, it only increased his worries. Beck was also in the video, with his fishbowl helmet on. Just the mere sight of him made Tony clench his hands. But none of those things were the reasons Tony was feeling sick. No, that was due to what Peter was doing.

It seemed that there was a bank robbery taking place at the bank when Peter and Beck had appeared. They had stopped the robbery and three of the robbers were laying on the ground. Each of them were covered in blood--but Tony couldn't see where it was coming from. It looked like it might be gunshot wounds, but that didn't add up. Beck had his mist and there was no gun in his hands. And Peter was Peter; he would nev--and then Tony saw the gun in his hands.

"Oh my God," he said again. "He-Peter-Gun--"

“Peter shot them,” Pepper said, a shaking hand covering her mouth. “I just watched it and--”

“EDITH, I need sound, now,” Tony said.

“Tony, no--”

*“Sound has been turned on.”*

Peter still had the gun in his hands and it was pointed towards the fourth and final bank robber. It wasn't shaking at all, meaning Peter felt entirely comfortable with the weapon in his hands. And it was that comfortableness that was scaring Tony to death. Peter had always told Tony that he didn't want any weapon besides his webs and his hands. Anything more than that made him uncomfortable, as he felt that a gun could lead to him accidentally killing someone--one of the fundamental morals Peter had when it came to being Spider-Man. Tony also had a feeling that Peter didn't like guns because that was how his uncle had died.

*“Please, sir,”* the robber said. She was on the ground, cowering away from Peter. Tony sucked in his breath, realizing that the criminal was begging for Peter to spare her life. Tony's shock at the video in front of him increased as he saw Peter smile. Peter, the kid who was scared of being more violent than necessary, was smiling as a criminal pleaded with him to spare her life. *“Please--”*

*“Kid, hurry up,”* Beck said, interrupting the robber. *“We gotta go.”* Sure enough, Tony could hear sirens coming.

“Peter, don't do it,” Tony commanded. He knew that Peter couldn't hear him, but that didn't mean he wouldn't try to stop the kid.

But he did anyway. He pulled the trigger, and the gun went off. The robber's pleas cut off mid-word and Peter tossed the gun away. Pepper gasped and Tony struggled to keep from crying out. Peter didn't look bothered by the fact that he had just killed someone; if anything, his smile only widened. He stepped away and faced Beck again. *“Let's go before the cops get here.”*

Beck nodded and the two of them left the bank--Beck using his mist to fly away and Peter using his webs to swing away. Tony reached a shaking hand to turn off the drone footage, not wanting to see the cops' reactions when they saw Peter's four victims.

Silence filled the lab, only broken by Pepper's soft cries. Tony stared--unseeingly--at the map in front of him. Drones were pinging everywhere, each one alerting Tony of where Peter and Beck were travelling by. After a minute or two of dead quiet, Pepper broke the silence.

“Find him,” she said quietly, seemingly not wanting to break the quiet. “He needs you.”

Tony nodded swiftly, more of a jerk than an actual nod. He stumbled away from the table, his right hand coming up to tap his nanotech housing unit. Before he did, Pepper turned around, her hand coming up quickly to grab his right wrist. She met his eyes, her blue eyes piercing into his brown ones. Tears shone in her eyes and tears were making tracks down her face. But her voice was still strong and steady, nothing like the emotional mess Tony was on the inside.

“He's going to be okay,” Pepper said, imploring him to believe her. But he couldn't--not when he had just watched Peter kill a man, maybe four. Not when Peter had almost punched him in the face mere hours ago. He knew that those things weren't the kid's fault--no, it was Beck and the symbiote's fault--but he also knew that Peter had the same mentality as Tony did. Peter would figure out how to place the blame on himself, seeing as it was his own two hands that did so. But it still didn't make it his fault. When Peter made it out of this, he was going to be mentally scarred--a

sure sign of being the opposite of “okay.” Pepper must’ve seen the disbelief in Tony’s eyes, for she repeated herself. “Peter’s going to be okay. Say it with me.”

Tony sighed. “Pep, I don’t--”

“Tony,” she said, cutting him off. “Say it.”

He refrained from rolling his eyes, knowing that the action would lead to an hour-long reprimand from Pepper. “Peter’s going to be okay,” he said, still not believing the words. Strangely, though, a weight loosened off of his shoulders.

“Correct.” She let go of his wrist and stepped backwards. “Now go. I’ll stay here and keep a watch on the drones.”

Suddenly, Tony remembered Peter’s vitals from earlier and what Karen had found in the air around Peter. “Prep the med bay,” Tony said. “Peter’s going to be hurt and I want the equipment to help him.”

Pepper nodded, not even questioning why Peter would be hurt. “I’ll call Helen,” she said, talking about Doctor Helen Cho. Before the Blip, she was Peter’s primary doctor, the only one who knew everything there was to know about Peter’s enhancements. “I think she’s still in Wakanda, but I think I can pull some strings to get her here.”

“Thanks, Pep,” Tony said, tapping on his housing unit. Quickly, a suit formed around him, minus the helmet. “I love you.”

“I love you, too. Now go; Peter needs you.”

With that, the helmet formed around Tony’s face. FRIDAY came online, her calm voice surrounding around Tony like a blanket. “*EDITH has sent me the location of the bank. I wasn’t sure what you wanted me to do with that information, but I pulled up the directions on how to get there.*”

“Perfect,” Tony replied. “That’s exactly what I wanted.” While it might’ve been a better idea to follow Peter and Beck to wherever they were going, Tony wanted to catch up to them when they stopped. Besides, there might be some more clues at the crime scene. He walked to the elevator, pushing the up button. It immediately opened and Tony stepped in. He turned to face Pepper, eyes watching her as she grabbed her phone. Tony realized that it was ringing and he made a move to step out, intending to figure out why someone was calling Pepper. Was it May? Did she have more information on Peter? Or was it about Morgan? Did something happen to her? *Oh God*, Tony thought. He couldn’t handle both of his kids in danger.

Pepper turned around, her hand shooing Tony away. “Go,” she mouthed as she answered the phone.

Tony let the doors of the elevator close, deciding that Pepper could handle any issue the phone call was bringing. Tony would handle the issues that he could. They were a team and the best teams were the ones where people did their separate tasks independently. If he interfered with Pepper’s tasks, he would only be stepping on her toes and wouldn’t get his own work done.

The doors opened to the main floor of the Penthouse--the one that had choked Tony with its memories. He walked through it, only focused on the door leading to the helicopter pad. He couldn’t afford to get distracted--not when Peter needed him.



Tony was almost to the bank on Junction Boulevard when he got a call from Pepper. His worry quickly spiking, he told FRIDAY to answer the call.

“Hey, Pep,” he said. “What is it?”

“*May called me,*” she said, answering Tony’s question about the phone call she had gotten when he was leaving. “*It’s about Peter.*”

“What did she say?” he asked.

“*The video that we watched about...*” her voice trailed off, but Tony easily knew what she was talking about. “*It just played on the news.*”

“What?” Tony asked incredulously. “That’s impossible. Beck’s controlling the CCTV cameras around the city. There’s no way the news could’ve--”

“*Unless Beck gave the footage to the press, allowing them to run a story about Spider-Man being a killer,*” Pepper interrupted. “*Don’t you see what is happening? Beck controls the narrative and he’s going to use the footage to fit in with his motivations. And, at least it seems, his motivation is to make people against Spider-Man.*”

“This is going to be bad,” Tony said. “How are we gonna change that? How are we going to fix this when we get to the other side?” Once they removed Beck from the equation, that would help Peter’s current predicament. But they wouldn’t be able to change the public’s view of him that easily. If Beck convinced the public to be against Spider-Man, how was Peter going to return to being Spider-Man again? He couldn’t--not when the world saw him as a killer.

“*Focus on the now, Tony. I’ll handle the press.*” The line went dead, telling Tony that she had just hung up. Tony opened his mouth, about to tell FRIDAY to call Pepper back when FRIDAY spoke.

“*This is the location, boss.*”

Tony forgot anything that he was going to tell Pepper. Instead, he took in the scene in front of him.

Police cars and ambulances were in front of the bank. Yellow tape blocked people from entering the crime scene. The lights on the emergency vehicles were on, but their sirens were off. News vehicles were also set up near the scene, only they were in front of the tape while the emergency vehicles were inside of it. Tony had to give props to the New York City emergency services for already being here and cleaning up the mess. Already, the three robbers who had been on the ground in the live footage Tony had seen had been placed in ambulances. He saw them moving on the gurneys inside of the vehicles and EMTs were bustling about, helping to treat their injuries. Tony felt some relief as he saw that they were alive. The fourth, however, was unmoving and a sheet had been placed on top of them. That had to have been the robber Tony had seen Peter shoot. And it seemed that he had--as Tony had feared--killed the criminal.

Tony landed in the middle of the crime scene, inside of the police tape. He ignored the shouts of alarm as he did so. Pedestrians were around the scene, calling out to him. Tony also heard news reporters pointing him out to their viewers at home. A police officer hurried up to speak with Tony.

“Sir,” he said, not even showing surprise or wonder at the fact that Iron Man was in front of him. Instead, he was professional and business-like as he talked with the superhero. “I’m afraid that this is a private--”

Tony held up a hand, cutting him off. “Look, I understand that your policies state that this is private and I’m not allowed here and all, but could you make an exception? For Tony Stark? For

Iron Man?”

Normally, that would be enough to shut anyone up and they would step to the side, letting him do as he pleased. But, this time, the officer was firm. “You’re going to have to leave, sir.”

“Officer...” Tony quickly looked at the name on his vest. “Officer Davis, I understand your hesitation, but I’m here for the same reason you are. Investigating the cause of this accident and helping catch the murderer of the bank robber.”

“We already know the murderer and we are catching him as we speak. Your assistance is unnecessary and, frankly, unwanted. Please leave the premise, sir.”

“You already know the murderer, hm?” Tony said. “Let me guess: Spider-Man? Look, Spidey’s my friend and I know that he won’t do something like this. And I already have evidence proving his innocence.” Not that anyone would ever see it, as it revealed Peter’s identity. “I’m doing my own investigation, so I ask that you stay out of my way.” He turned away, about to head farther into the scene. However, he turned around to another officer in his way. This one had the captain nametag on his vest, telling Tony that he had more authority than Officer Davis.

“Iron Man,” the captain said, sticking out his hand for Tony to shake. “I’m Captain George Stacy of the NYPD.”

“Hi,” Tony said, shaking the proffered hand. “I’m sorta in the middle of something right now, but--”

“Captain, I’ve already told him to leave,” Officer Davis said. “He refuses to.”

“And for good reason,” Tony retorted before turning his attention back to Captain Stacy. “A good friend of mine is being framed for a crime he didn’t commit and I’m here to prove his innocence.”

“Prove his innocence?” the captain asked. “Stark, I think the video the press has shown more than proves Spider-Man’s guilt and--”

“With all due respect, you don’t have the full story.”

“I don’t need the context to see the truth. Spidey had a gun in his hands and he shot someone, killing them instantly. End of discussion.”

“No, not end of discussion,” Tony said. “Spider-Man’s being coerced into being violent. Tell me, does this sound like him? In the two years that Spider-Man has been swinging around Queens, has he ever killed someone? Has he ever even held a gun in his hands before? No. He has never, until the new hero popped up. Until he became friends with Mysterio. This whole thing is Mysterio. Mysterio is manipulating Spidey and forcing him to kill. So the real suspect you should be focused on is him, not Spider-Man.”

Captain Stacy gave a low whistle. “That’s one hell of an accusation, Stark. Especially to go against such damning evidence for Spider-Man being a murderer. I hope you have concrete evidence for me?”

“None that I’m willing to share,” he said. “And that is why I am here.”

The captain tapped his chin thoughtfully. “Fine,” he said, after a few seconds of silence--silence that Tony had been desperate to break. “I trust your word. I’m not the guy responsible for catching the right people, but you’ve given me a case to arrest Mysterio. You get your evidence and I’ll get Spidey and the new guy.” He turned away, letting Tony go. While Tony didn’t want the captain

wasting his resources on Peter--who was 100% innocent--at least the captain was going after the guilty person, too.

Tony turned around to face Officer Davis. "You heard the guy. I have permission to be here so if you would--"

"I'll help you," the officer said.

Tony turned to face the man, raising his eyebrow. While the officer couldn't see his face, it seemed that he still understood that Tony was confused. "I know I was against you being here early, but what the captain says goes. I might not be a huge fan of Spidey, but I did miss the guy during the Blip years. And I have to agree, this"--Officer Davis gestured to the crime scene surrounding them--"is not his style. I want to get to the bottom of this, so I'll help you."

"Good," Tony said. "What happened when you first arrived?"

"I was the first officer on scene here," he said. "I had gotten a call about a bank robbery, so I pulled into the street expecting that. What I did not expect, though, was the sound of a gun firing. I rushed to the scene, finding one person dead and three severely injured people."

"What were their injuries?" Tony asked, having to ask the question that he already knew the answer to.

"Gunshot wounds. All four. One had been shot in their wrist. It might've hit some nerves, meaning that they might lose that hand. Another had been shot in the stomach and the third had been shot in the leg--that's the least concerning one. The fourth had been shot in the head, killing her instantly. I immediately called for an ambulance, seeing as they needed immediate medical attention--attention way above my skill level. I also called for back-up, seeing as we were looking at a murder case. While I waited, I noticed something extremely odd."

"Can you describe it to me?"

Officer Davis shook his head. "It's easy if I just show it to you." He gestured for Tony to follow him inside the bank. Broken glass littered the floor of the bank and money was strewn all over the place. It seemed that Peter and Beck had interrupted the robbery in the middle of it and had led the criminals outside. Near the front of the bank, where a large window had sat, was a glop of black. Tony recognized it as the symbiote.

"This thing was outside, in front of the body," the officer explained. "I saw it moving and it freaked the hell out of me."

Tony crouched down, confused as to how it got here. Obviously, it had inched its way into the bank, but how had it detached itself from Peter's suit? And why?

"I have no idea what it is, but I nicknamed it Venom."

Tony couldn't help but laugh at the name.

"What?" Officer Davis asked. "It looks like it could be poisonous."

"I wasn't laughing at the name. It's extremely fitting." And it was. It was similar to venom, poisoning Peter's thoughts and actions--leading to him being distant with his family and violent. "FRI, run a scan." While Tony was pretty positive that it was the symbiote, he still wanted confirmation on it. Besides, the courts would need it.

*"Scan complete,"* FRIDAY said. Officer Davis looked up at the sound of her voice, making Tony realize that the AI was speaking through his internal and external speakers, allowing the officer to hear her words. *"Unidentified substance, but I can confirm that it is some sort of alien."*

"Alien?" the officer wondered aloud. "This thing is an alien?" He took a step backwards, obviously scared to be close to a creature from another planet.

"Yep. And this is the alien that has been giving Spider-Man some trouble."

Officer Davis looked at it, seeming to be thinking about something. When he spoke next, he sounded certain. "This is what made Spider-Man kill that robber. And shoot the three other robbers. But you told Captain Stacy that Mysterio was the one--oh. Mysterio found Venom and gave it to Spider-Man."

Tony gave the officer an impressed look. "Correct with everything. You're a fast thinker."

The man chuckled. "You sound surprised."

"Well--"

But whatever he was about to say was cut off by the sound of the officer's crackling radio. The two of them exchanged a glance, then turned their attention to the walkie-talkie on Officer Davis' belt.

*"All units,"* the dispatcher said. *"All units, we have an explosion at a warehouse located at 93-11 34th Avenue. I repeat, we have an--"*

"That's where Parkridge High School is," Officer Davis said.

"A school?" Tony asked alarmedly. "You should--"

"No, no," the officer assured. "It's where a school *used* to be. It closed down during the Blip, since it was no longer needed. Y'know, half the city vanished. They didn't have enough students or teachers to fill it."

"What is it used for now?"

Officer Davis shrugged. "It's abandoned now. I wouldn't be surprised if some gang took it over and another gang targeted them, causing an explosion to go off."

But it was never that simple. Tony had a feeling that the explosion had something to do with Peter and Beck. Before he could voice his concerns, a siren went off. Then another. And another. Tony turned around and watched as three ambulances left, each one carrying one of the three injured criminals no doubt. Then, two of the police cars' sirens went off as their drivers navigated them out of the crime scene. They sped off, most likely heading off in the direction of the explosion.

"Look at it," Officer Davis said, causing Tony to turn back around to face the man. He was pointing at Venom and Tony looked down and watched as it moved away from them. It wasn't moving slowly, either. No, it was moving as fast as it could to the corner of the bank, obviously trying to get away from something. But Tony couldn't tell what that something was. Officer Davis, it turned out, did. "It doesn't like the sirens."

Tony's head jerked back to watch the receding sirens. As they went out of earshot, he looked back at Venom. Sure enough, the symbiote had stopped moving--showing that the officer's guess was correct.

And just like that, Tony had an idea. “I gotta go,” he said, walking out of the bank.

Officer Davis followed him out to the street. “Go? Go where?”

But Tony didn’t hear him, since he blasted away from the crime scene. He headed in the direction of the Tower, knowing that he had to use his lab to make his idea.

Officer Davis watched as Iron Man disappeared from eyesight. “Guess I’ll just figure out what to do with Venom myself.” He turned back around and started to head back inside of the bank. However, he was met with the sight of a photographer taking pictures inside the bank.

“Hey!” the officer shouted. “Only authorized personnel are allowed in the crime scene!”

The photographer turned around, flashing Officer Davis an apologetic smile. “Sorry, officer. My mistake.” He shifted his camera strap so that the camera was behind him. He held out the hand that had been previously holding the camera lens, intending to shake the officer’s hand--a hand that Officer Davis ignored. The photographer took his hand back, but his smile stayed on his face. “Eddie Brock, Daily Bugle. I was wondering if you could give me a statement on what happened here tonight.”

Officer Davis shook his head. “No statement. And I insist that you leave.”

“Of course, officer,” Brock said, still smiling. “Have a good day.” Officer Davis watched him closely as the photographer left, ensuring that he actually left the crime scene. Past experience with the press had taught him to keep a close eye on them--they were great at slipping into places where they were unwanted. Once he made sure Brock was on the correct side of the tape, Officer Davis turned back to look at Venom.

Only to discover that nothing was there. He frowned, turning around to find the photographer--thinking that he must’ve taken Venom. After all, he was the last one near the alien--the officer knew that he nor Stark took it.

Officer Davis made it outside of the bank, looking around for Brock. But he had disappeared--just like Venom had.

“What the hell?” Officer Davis said under his breath. It seemed that the rest of his night was going to be filled with odd things--from Spider-Man being a murder suspect to people disappearing.

## **Part Four**

*But she'd have nothing left to sell him*

**End**

## Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked it! Stay tuned for next week's chapter and for the start of the last part:  
Part five!

# Chapter Fifteen

## Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday! I watched No Way Home and my goodness, it's amazing!! I hope you guys get a chance to see it; it was absolutely one of the best movies I've seen all year! Anyways, I hope you like this week's chapter and the start of the final part, part five!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### Part Five

*There's nothing wrong with just a taste of what you paid for*

*Tuesday, September 19, 2023*

Tony landed on the helicopter pad of the tower. He shook off the sense of déjà vu that hit him as he did so. Even so, he couldn't shake it off entirely. His landing was eerily similar to his landing earlier that afternoon. Both situations had Peter in trouble and the Tower provided the resources for helping him. But the current predicament wasn't as dire as the one earlier. And Tony didn't think that it could possibly get any worse. Images of Titan worked their way into Tony's mind, reminding him that things could always get worse. Peter could di--

He cut that thought off as quickly as it arrived. There was no way that he was going to let that happen a second time. Never again would he fail Peter as much as he had on Titan.

Tony made his way down to the lab. Inside, he found Pepper scrolling through the map, green dots blinking as drones across the city saw Peter. He stepped next to his wife, wrapping an arm around her.

"Anything happen while I was gone?" he asked.

"There was an explosion at an abandoned school. Peter's behind it."

Tony flinched. "I knew about the explosion, but I didn't know about Peter's involvement." He had his fears, of course, but he didn't want them to be proved correct.

"I watched the footage from one of the drones. Peter and Beck went into the building and, while they were in it, it exploded."

"While they were-Pepper, is Peter okay?"

She nodded. "Another drone saw them leave the scene, unharmed. Now..." her voice trailed off as she gestured towards the map. Tony followed her gaze, watching as countless green lights blinked. Each blinking light was a drone signaling that they found Peter. Having multiple drones pinging most likely meant that Peter and Beck were flying around the city, causing each drone they passed to light up.

Suddenly, Pepper's phone rang.

The woman took it out of her pocket, her face falling as she read the caller ID. "It's May."

Tony's worry suddenly spiked. May's sudden phone call rubbed Tony the wrong way. Was he about to be proven correct? Were things about to get worse? Was Peter de--

"Answer it," Tony said, not wanting to finish that last thought.

Pepper did so, her hands shaking as she pressed the speaker button. "Hey, May. Tony's here with me."

*"Good; he needs to hear this as well. The news got a hold of the footage from the abandoned school. Not only that, they found footage from inside of the school."*

"Oh my God," Pepper exclaimed. "What channel?"

*"4. He's just in time for the seven o'clock news special,"* she said sarcastically, her words dripping with bitter humor.

Even before they could tell FRIDAY to do so, a screen was popping up over top of the map of Queens, showing the news special. A news anchor sat in front of a desk, his face calm and impassive as he spoke. How he was so calm when Tony himself wasn't was confusing to Tony. Another news anchor sat next to him, but her face held some of the worry that was swimming through Tony at the moment.

*"--who are just tuning in,"* the male anchor was saying. *"There was an explosion at PS 149, an abandoned school located in Jackson Heights, Queens. The school closed down five years ago, when half of the--"* Suddenly the footage began playing and Tony tuned out the anchor, instead focusing on the video.

It was in black and white and there was a lack of sound. Tony was surprised that it was even working, considering that the school had been closed for five years. It was in an old classroom, completely devoid of any furniture. A group of people--maybe five--were standing around, talking with one another. They were obviously criminals, judging from their angry looks and sketchy appearances. Their angry looks also made it seem that they were in the middle of a heated discussion--a discussion that was about to go sour shortly, as one of the criminals had his hand resting on a pistol. Windows covered one of the walls, allowing the rising moon to reflect into the room.

Suddenly, one window broke as Peter swung into the middle of the room, landing in the center of the group of people. Beck flew in after him. Tony guessed that they exchanged words between them and the criminals for a couple of seconds before the room exploded into action.

The criminal that had been fingering his gun earlier pulled it out of its holster completely, aiming it at Peter. Before he could fire it, Beck's mist covered the man. When the mist cleared, he was on the ground--Tony couldn't tell if he was alive or not.

Meanwhile, Peter had flung himself at one of the people, using his webs to cocoon him. Before he could finish the job, another criminal appeared from behind, bringing up a knife to stab him in the back. Before it could touch him, Peter flipped out of the way, landing onto the ceiling. A fourth person reached into his pocket, pulling something out. Tony gasped as he saw that it was a grenade.

Peter recognized it the same instant Tony did. Maybe even quicker, if Tony was being honest. His webs shot forward, knocking the grenade out of the man's hand. Tony waited for it to explode, but it never came. If the explosion wasn't caused by that, then what had it been caused by? Peter dropped from the ceiling, landing on the shoulders of the grenade guy. He leaned back, causing the

criminal to lose his balance. He started to fall backwards, Peter bringing his hands up, clearly intending to web his way off of the criminal before he could get crushed by the falling man.

But he didn't do it in time. The criminal fell backwards, Peter still on his back. Peter ended up completely trapped underneath the larger and heavier man. Tony inhaled sharply, knowing that Peter had claustrophobia--a perfectly rational fear after what had happened with Vulture. But when the criminal scrambled up off of Peter, Peter didn't look freaked out at all. In fact, he stood up quickly and continued fighting.

Tony frowned. He knew how bad Peter's fear was. It was enough to make him go into an instant panic attack. Once, Peter had to spend an hour collecting himself after a pretty bad run-in with his fear. Even on the good days, Peter had to take a minute or two to collect himself. Never had he ever sprung back so quickly after an experience with a tight space. How had Peter been able to shrug it off so quickly?

Peter used his webs to launch himself up into the air. Once in the air, he continued to use his webs, swinging around the small room to kick the criminals down. Beck then used his mist to keep them down. Once all three of the criminals were passed out on the ground, Peter landed. The criminal Beck had knocked out earlier was still on the ground and Tony was thankful to see the faint rise and fall of his chest. Peter gave Beck a high-five, clearly happy to be done with the fighting.

But it was nowhere close to being done. Both of the heroes had forgotten about the fifth person that had been in the room. They suddenly appeared again, twenty people behind him. The two groups--the two heroes and the twenty-one criminals--stood unmoving, staring at one another. Then, Peter was off in a flash, running towards a corner of the room--a corner that was the farthest one away from the criminals. His quick movements prompted the other people in the room into action. Beck lifted his hands, seemingly trying to get his mist appeared. Only it never came. The criminals, meanwhile, raised their guns, firing at Peter.

Peter leaped and twisted out of the way of each bullet, no doubt thanks to his spidey-sense. Tony's heart was in his mouth as he watched the kid dodge the bullets, dodging Death with each twist of his body. He finally made it to the corner, scooping down to pick something up. Tony's eyes widened as he saw what it was--the grenade from earlier. He then turned back around and Tony expected him to throw the bomb, triggering the explosion that had left everyone reeling. Only he didn't, causing Tony to become confused once again. Instead, Peter flipped up onto the ceiling, running lightly across it. He ran over the heads of each of the criminals--who were so shocked by a guy *running* on the ceiling that they were frozen--and gave a little wave. Once he passed the criminals, he flipped down to the ground and continued to run. He disappeared out of the camera frame, off doing something.

After Peter's disappearance, there was no movement on the video, Beck and the criminals seemingly in shock from the spideryness that they had just witnessed. From the lull in the fighting, the words from the anchor finally filtered into Tony's head.

*"---Man has just disappeared, which you can tell from what is on your screen right now. We are trying to find foot-oh, here we go."*

The video changed, switching from the view of the classroom--whose occupants had just exploded into movement--to a supply room. Dusty cabinets sat along the walls and there were no windows in the room. Peter moved intently, looking as if he had a clear goal in mind. Tony studied each of the cabinets, which all appeared to be empty--save one. Its shelves were fully stocked; stocked with what appeared to be liquids.

Tony suddenly realized where Peter was and what his purpose was: Peter was in an old chemistry



supply room; a room that used to be stocked full with different chemicals--including highly flammable ones. The anchors on the news appeared to be on the same train of thought as Tony, for they had reached the same conclusion.

*--appears as if Spider-Man is in an old supply room in the chemistry labs. The he-excuse me, villain"--Tony felt his blood chill as he heard the anchor's correction--"appears to be looking for something."* Indeed, Peter was currently rummaging through the abandoned liquids.

Another anchor's voice joined in with the male anchor, this one sounding female. *"Wait, why would Spider-Man go in there?"*

*"The room used to hold all sorts of equipment necessary to conduct labs--including flammable chemicals."*

*"Flam-but shouldn't that have been cleared out when the school was shut down?"*

*"It must've been missed in the confusion of the school losing half of its staff members."*

Peter finally pulled one of the chemicals out, seemingly triumphant with his find. Tony's sense of unease continued to grow. Peter ran out of the room and the camera switched to the one of the old classroom.

While Peter had been gone, Beck and the criminals had started fighting again. Beck's mist still appeared to not be working, causing him to resort to hand-to-hand combat--a fighting skill that was definitely not his strong suit and not effective against twenty-one people that excelled in hand-to-hand fighting.

Suddenly, Peter burst into the room. He jumped up and used his webs to swing through the room. The lid on the container was off, allowing the liquid inside to spill everywhere. He also shook it, causing more of it to spill. On his way past Beck, he swooped down, grabbing the man. Together, the two people swung out the window, Peter throwing the grenade behind them. The room exploded. Before the explosion destroyed the camera, though, Peter looked behind him, allowing Tony to see Peter's face. The mask from the symbiote was snug enough for Tony to see the wide grin on his face. It seemed that Peter was happy about the destruction he had just wrought. Then, the camera cut out, and the two anchors appeared on the screen.

The female anchor's worry had drastically grown in the minutes the footage had been on the screen. Her co-worker's previously calm face had been replaced with one filled with shock. Tony and Pepper weren't faring much better. Pepper, of course, had already guessed as to what had happened inside of the abandoned school, but speculations were much, much different than seeing reality. She had fallen into a chair, a shaking hand still holding on tight to the phone connected to May. Tony's hands were clenching and unclenching as the full extent of what they had just seen registered with him.

Peter had just exploded a school. Peter had just killed twenty-one people. Including the four he had fought earlier--who had been passed out on the ground when the explosion went off--he had just killed twenty-five people. It didn't matter that they were criminals or not; the fact still remained: Peter Parker--the kid who had saved Vulture right after the man had almost beaten him to death, had dropped a building on top of him, and threatened to kill Peter's friends and family--had just killed twenty-five people, making his grand total of the day twenty-six. And it wasn't in self-defense or indirectly like Tony's death count from his time as an Avenger. No, Peter had intended for them to die and did so. And he had *enjoyed* it, if the grin at the end was true.

But it wasn't Peter that was doing this. It was the symbiote. It was Beck's manipulative self,

forcing the kid to feel like the only out of his situation was to accept the symbiote. It may have been Peter's hand pulling the trigger and his arm throwing the grenade, but it wasn't in his control. Because the symbiote was the one controlling it. Because Beck had given the symbiote to Peter. Tony had to stop this. And that brought him back to the reason why he was in the lab in the first place.

"FRI," he said. "Turn off the news. And also pull up the frequency of a police siren."

"Tony?" Pepper asked. "What are you planning?"

"*Are you going to help him?*" May asked, her voice breaking from her sobs. Tony's eyes met Pepper's and he realized that they were both thinking the same thing.

"I am going to do everything in my power to bring Peter home," Tony promised, for the second time in less than a month. And it was another promise that he wasn't going to break.

Pepper chimed in. "And we're going to need your help, May. Okay? We need your help."

May's cries became softer and her voice was shaking just slightly when she spoke next. "*What do you need me to do?*"

"We need you here. Once Tony finds Peter, he's going to bring him to the Tower and you're going to be needed when he arrives. You're a nurse, right?"

"*Mhm.*"

"Then you can put that training to good use. Peter's most likely going to be hurt and you're our best bet for helping treat him."

"*I don't know anything about his metabolism or his healing abilities.*"

"I called Helen. She's on her way here, but she's going to need a nurse, May. She's going to need you. *Peter* needs you."

May's crying completely stopped and there was no trace of the shakiness in her voice in her next words. "*Okay. I'll be there as soon as possible. What about Morgan?*"

Tony answered this time. "Bring her, too. I think Peter's going to need his little sister while he heals, don't you?"

"*Yeah, I do. I'll be there in twenty minutes.*" With that, she hung up. Tony turned his attention to Pepper.

"How the hell did you do that?" he asked.

"Do what?" she asked innocently.

"Say exactly what needed to be said. How did you know how to make May feel better?"

Pepper shrugged. "I know what it's like feeling like you can't do anything and you have to rely on other people to help those you love. I have to every single time I see you slip on a suit to go on another Avenger mission. I have to every single time you go off to save the world. And that feeling of helplessness is what kills you. It's not just the idea that something bad is happening to your family; it's the feeling of not being able to help them while they're suffering."

Tony looked away. Her words hit a little too close to home after Titan. He knew Peter was in pain;

he knew that Peter was dying, yet he wasn't able to stop it. To think that Pepper experienced that sense of helplessness every single time he went out as Iron Man made him feel guilty. "I'm sorry," he said.

"I didn't say that to make you feel guilty. Don't apologize for something that you have no intention of stopping."

"I--"

"And don't even *try* to tell me that this is the last time you're going to be Iron Man. Because as long as you are going to be on the earth, there will be a threat to stop. Because as long as there is a threat to stop, you'll be out there. And I am okay with that. If I wasn't, I wouldn't be here right now. If I wasn't, I wouldn't have married you. If I wasn't, I wouldn't be a mother to your daughter and to your son right now. So don't tell me that you're done being Iron Man. Because that is not the man I married."

Any words Tony was going to say died on his lips once he saw Pepper's determined expression. "Yes, ma'am," he said instead.

Pepper smiled at him. "Now go save Peter."

...

His idea took an hour to make. While he made it, Pepper informed him of each and every movement that Peter made, checking the footage whenever he stopped somewhere. Peter and Beck only paused to stop various crimes and none of their pit-stops were anywhere near the violence that had happened in their two previous stops. The media, it seemed, didn't have access to any more cameras, as Peter didn't make any more appearances on TV. However, every single news station was discussing the events at the Bank of America and at the abandoned school. It had even graced national news, as Peter had become a well-known figure throughout the country after the events in 2018.

May arrived twenty minutes into Tony's creation of his idea. Morgan was asleep in her arms and Pepper helped May make up a bed for Morgan upstairs on one of the couches. May had the foresight to bring linens with her to do so. When she and Pepper had gotten Morgan settled, Pepper had gone back to drone duty while May bustled around the med bay, finding the smallest tasks to busy herself. Tony had been about to stop her, but Pepper quickly whispered that an unnecessary task was better than no task at all. Tony shut up after that.

Happy had even arrived, twenty minutes after May's arrival. He grumbled about a delayed flight, even though he was in the city hours before Tony was anticipating. With him was fast-food. Just the mere sight of the food made Tony realize that he had skipped both lunch and dinner--and it was going on eight. Pepper and May had reacted the same way, highlighting just how worried the three of them were. After gobbling down their cheeseburgers, they went their separate paths, Happy helping Pepper on drone duty and May still scrambling around the med bay.

Finally, ten minutes past eight, the idea had been built. At the same time, Happy called Tony over to the drone map. He walked over, not spotting any issues with the map. Each of the green lights were on, showing that they were online. What was--then he realized what the issue was. None of them were blinking.

"What happened with the drones?" Tony asked. "Where's Peter?"

"W-we don't know," Pepper said, her voice stuttering from the fear that was clearly building inside

of her. “Everything was fine, they were blinking, Peter and Beck were on the move and--”

“Then, just two minutes ago, nothing,” Happy said. “They all stopped blinking.”

“How did that happen, Tony?” Pepper asked. “Is there a glitch? Did Beck find out about our drones and hack them?”

“This is a closed system, designed by me. No one can hack my stuff.”

Happy scoffed. “What about Peter and his friend?”

Tony elected to ignore him. “Besides, how can he discover invisible drones? And even if he did, why is he blocking Peter’s location from us? Wouldn’t it be easier to just destroy the whole lot of them? No, that’s not happening. And it’s not a glitch because, again, this is my tech we’re talking about. My tech does not glitch.”

“What about that Christmas tree? With those lights that you had designed? For Christmas 2017? Didn’t it short circuit and cause--”

“Happy, oh my God, you are about to be kicked off of the Spidey Watch team.”

Someone gasped. Tony whirled around, his nanotech creating a gauntlet around his right arm, which he had brought up to deal with the threat.

May stood in front of him, her eyebrows raising as she saw his reaction.

Tony sighed, lowering his arm. He called the gauntlet off, the nanotech disappearing back into its housing unit. “May. You scared me.”

“That was sorta obvious. Anyways, did I hear you correctly? Did you three form a team without me?”

“Yes.”

“No.”

“There is no team.”

Tony looked at Happy, offended. “What do you mean there is no team? There absolutely is a team.”

May crossed her arms. “I think the bigger issue at hand is the fact that you said ‘yes.’ Were you seriously forming a team about protecting my--”

“Guys!” Pepper shouted. “I think we have a much, much larger issue than a stupid team!”

This time, Tony was the one that gasped. “Pep, how dare--” His voice cut off as he realized where Pepper was pointing. A sole light was blinking on the drone map. Happy rushed over, pulling up the footage from the drone. Tony looked down at the volume, making sure that the audio was still on, just in case they needed it. It was. Happy stepped back, allowing all of them a clear view of the footage.

The two heroes were on a rooftop, the same rooftop that Tony recognized as the one they had eaten lunch at. Beck’s helmet lay discarded at his feet, but Peter still had his mask on. Peter was standing off on own side, leaning against a wall. His arms were folded over its chest, making it seem that he either didn’t want to be there or that he didn’t care about the events happening around him. Tony

couldn't figure out which meaning was worse. Beck faced the camera and started to speak directly to it, making Tony realize that the man had full knowledge of their drones.

*"Hello, Stark," Beck said. "I'm sure you're wondering how I managed to find your drones. Well, you see, it's easy. Especially when I have an intern from SI with me. Yes, Peter here helped me hack into your system."*

*"But I'm getting ahead of myself. We can talk about your tech in a moment. I understand that my friend's antics have been bothering you"--Beck gestured to Peter, who gave a slight twitch at the gesture--"and I'm willing to offer a deal for you. Pete here will stop all the senseless killings and you will give me EDITH."*

Tony's eyes widened. How did he know about EDITH?

Beck chuckled. Even though he couldn't see Tony's reaction, it seemed that he was anticipating one, for he had a response to it. *"You're surprised, aren't you? You should've hidden your work better, Stark. Seriously, how blind do you think I am? I noticed the AI you were building when I was working on BARF. And I took special notice when you put my work and your AI into those stupid glasses!"* Beck's voice had risen into a shout at the very end, but he quickly schooled his expression. How did he do a 180 that drastically? How did he switch from shouting to being as calm as a summer breeze in less than two seconds? *"I shrugged off my concerns, though. After all, you're the great Tony Stark. You have a perfectly good reason for everything you do."* Beck's disdainful tone made it impossible to believe his words. *"But I couldn't stop myself when I found out what you were planning to do with EDITH. Or, to speak more plainly, who you were planning on gifting her to. Him."*

*"But, yet again, I'm getting far, far ahead of myself. We don't need to get into this right now, not when I can't see your facial expressions. You meet me here, at this rooftop, in ten minutes. Come alone and bring EDITH with you. Or you can say bye-bye to Petey here."* Beck waved, laughing as he did so. Happy slapped a hand on the button to close the video, seemingly eager to end the one-sided conversation.

No one said anything for a few seconds. Then, they erupted into sound.

"How could that--"

"Oh my God, Peter. Oh my--"

"I'm going to start work on--"

"FRIDAY, plot a course--"

"--jerk think it's okay to--"

"--God, Peter. Oh my God--"

"--building a case against--"

"--now. I have to be there."

Everyone went quiet at Tony's words, looking at him in shock. Finally, Pepper broke the silence. "What did you just say?"

"I'm going." Yet again, the room filled with various different cries of disbelief.

“Tony, that thing is a--”

“Boss, I support you on many different--”

“--trap. You can’t just--”

“--idiotic adventures, but not--”

“Go.”

For the third time in less than five minutes, silence penetrated the room. Only this time, it was caused by May. The three other people turned around, looking at her in shock.

Tony took her in; took in the messy hair and the pajamas and the crooked glasses on her nose; took in the tears on her face and the fingernails chewed to their quicks by worry. He took it all in and accepted her command.

“Yes, May,” he said. Before Happy and Pepper could speak, Tony did so. “Yes, Pepper, I agree; this is a trap. Yes, Happy, I know that this is stupid. But it is what has to happen. I think I speak for all of us when I say that this jerk needs to be stopped. I know that all of us are worried out of our damn minds for Peter’s safety. A lot has happened in the past twelve hours--hell, the last week--but all of this, the worry, the fear, the spontaneous travelling, has all led us to this moment. The moment that we can finally stop Beck and save Peter. The moment that we can make all of this worry and fear go away. So I don’t care that this is a trap. I don’t care if it’s a stupid plan. I don’t care if it’s a suicide mission. None of that matters; not when I can help Pete.

“And I know that all of you feel that way. We all care so damn much for that kid, or else we wouldn’t be here right now. We all want to help him. This is the way to do that. This is the only path.”

Silence, yet again, filled the room. This time, however, it felt like a determined feeling had entered with the silence. And something else that Tony couldn’t place. Earlier, dread and shock had filtered into each silence, but, this time, those feelings hadn’t. No, it was....it was... *hope* . Hope for the coming hours. Hope for the outcome. Hope in Tony’s plan.

“We’re with you,” Pepper said.

Happy nodded. “Go,” he said, repeating May’s command.

“You beat that monster that hurt my nephew and you bring Peter back here.” May’s hands were clenched at her side and her face was filled with a fiery drive, a fiery rage that Tony had only seen once before, when May had yelled at him right after she had found out about Peter’s alter-ego. “Or so help me God, I will kill you.”

Tony looked at all three of the faces in front of him; Pepper, filled with a hope that nothing could diminish; Happy, filled with a determination that could not be swayed; May, filled with a rage powerful enough to rival the sun’s hateful rays in the desert. Tony looked within himself, finding that he was filled with all three emotions, plus one more: Persistence. He had hope that Peter would be all right; he had determination that his plan would work out; he had a rage that he would use against Beck; but he also had a persistence that he would never give up on Peter. He would never stop fighting to save the kid and he would continue to do so; attempt after attempt, failure after failure. Because nothing, not even the death of Peter, could stop him.

“I’m going to go save Peter.” With that, he grabbed his device that he had spent the last hour working on (hoping he wouldn’t have to use it), grabbed EDITH, tapped his nanotech housing unit,

and left the room; heading off into a certain trap.

## Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked the chapter! Stay tuned for next week's chapter! Merry Christmas!

# Chapter Sixteen

## Chapter Notes

Good morning! I apologize for the late update but I hope y'all enjoy this week's chapter!

TW: Suicide at the very end.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### Part Five

*There's nothing wrong with just a taste of what you paid for*

*Tuesday, September 19, 2023*

It only took a few minutes to get to Peter's location, but, to Tony at least, it felt like a lifetime. The whole way there, Tony reminded himself of the people supporting him, Pepper, Happy, and May. All three were experiencing the same helplessness that Pepper had described after Tony got off the phone with May; a helplessness that he had experienced watching Peter die in his arms. Their hopes all rested in Tony and it was that hope fueling him.

Once he arrived at the roof, Tony waited a few seconds to take stock of the situation. But nothing had changed from the video. Peter, arms crossed, was still leaning up against the wall. Beck still had his helmet off and was standing, facing the invisible drone. At least, that's where Tony assumed he was looking. The drone was still invisible. Tony landed in front of Beck.

"Stark," Beck said. "Nice of you to finally join us."

"As if you gave me a choice," Tony retorted, before focusing on Peter. "Peter?" The kid, like he had in the video, twitched. Other than that, he made no movement, said nothing.

Beck rolled his eyes. "I didn't call you here to talk with Peter. And besides, he can't hear you."

Peter twitched again. It was a small movement, but it was enough for Tony to know that Beck was wrong. "Let me guess, the symbiote?"

Beck blinked in surprise. "You know about the symbiote?"

"Apparently." Tony rolled his eyes. Honestly, villains think they were so clever, but their plans were always easy to spot. "Get rid of the alien."

"First, you give me EDITH."

Suddenly, the weight of the glasses in Tony's pocket increased. "I don't think so."

Beck tilted his head to the side. "I told you that giving me EDITH is the only way to keep Peter safe. Are you backing out of that deal?"

"Perhaps. It depends on how you answer my questions." Tony crossed his arms.



Beck chuckled. "I guess it's only fair. Though I think it would be easier for us to talk if you step out of your suit."

"And make it easy for you to kill me?" At his words, Peter's crossed arms tightened. "I don't think so." As Tony had thought he would, Beck did force the matter.

"It wasn't a question," the man said, holding up a remote. "This button right here will set off an EMP that will shut down your suit. So, I will ask you again: Step out of your suit if you want to talk."

Beck had to be bluffing. And even if he had an EMP, he wouldn't risk setting off, not when it would shut down part of the city--a city that was heavily run off of electricity (it was called the city that never sleeps for a reason, after all). Then again, he was a villain, set only on destruction. He wouldn't care if his actions impacted the millions of people living in the city. And besides, the EMP could impact his own tech. Beck definitely wouldn't want to risk that.

And Tony was stubborn, Pepper said so on a daily basis. Maybe that was the real reason he crossed his arms and refused to do what Beck asked him to do. "No."

Beck grinned. "Very well, then." He pressed the button. For a second, Tony thought it didn't work.

And then everything went dark.

Tony's HUD disappeared, taking with it Peter's vitals, his own vitals, and the comm link that was open between him and FRIDAY. Unlike his previous suits--which would have become extremely heavy and impossible to control for anyone that wasn't enhanced--the suit stayed somewhat light, thanks to the nanotech. But the suit itself only lasted for a split second.

The EMP had taken out the arc reactor, which, in turn, had led to anything electrical failing. But the reactor also contained the nanotech housing unit and also powered that, which meant that the control system for the nanotech had completely failed, causing his suit to dissolve into pieces around him.

*Dammit!* Tony thought. Beck wasn't bluffing after all. Tony looked at Beck, trying to figure out if he had been impacted at all. With the wide smirk on his face, Tony doubted it. Tony glanced at the city around him, looking for any lights that had gone out. There weren't any at all, meaning that Beck had only had a small EMP, powerful enough to take out Tony's suit but nowhere near powerful enough to do anything more than that.

And it was that fact that wounded Tony's pride. In the first few years of being Iron Man, Tony had been hit with an EMP mid-flight during an Avengers mission. He had ended up being saved by Sam (who had joined the team a couple months prior), which had been fairly humiliating. Ever since, Tony had ensured that each and every one of his suits had adequate protection against an EMP, including Peter's suit that he was currently wearing (not that the kid knew that) and the prosthetic arm he had got following the second battle against Thanos a month ago (something he was very grateful for, as he still had use of his right arm). However, it had seemed that he had failed to do that with his nanotech suit.

Granted, life had gotten in the way of correctly creating the suit. He and Peter had worked on the suit in the months following the Homecoming incident. By the time the aliens had attacked New York in 2018, the nano suit had only accomplished one successful test flight. Any additional progress on the suit had died along with Peter on Titan. Tony had fixed the suit after the damages it sustained in the first fight against Thanos, but didn't do much more than that. The project had been overseen by Peter as well as him, which meant that any work on the suit reminded him

heavily of the kid. Because of that, he didn't add any additional features onto the suit--including an EMP shield it seemed.

Pepper had always told him that he could get obsessed over the littlest detail and fail to see the bigger picture. It seemed that that mentality had reared its head in this project; he had been so focused on creating a revolutionary nanotech suit that he had failed to see the potential flaws in it.

Ignoring Beck's satisfied smirk, Tony wiped his hands together, trying to gather any dignity that he could. "Anyways," he said, opting to ignore how Beck had just bested him. "I have some questions for you. Mainly, why?" Tony already had a well-formed idea on Beck's motivation, but he wanted to hear the man's explanation for himself.

"Now that is quite a story, a story that I think you already know."

"Humor me, won't you?"

"Very well. Seven years ago, I finished work on a piece of hologram technology. It had massive amounts of potential, yet none of it was achieved. Because of you. You were the one who decided to turn my weapon into a therapy machine. You named my tech BARF, turning it into a laughing stock. You told the whole world about my technology, yet you never gave me any credit. No, you fired me, ruined my prospects of ever getting another job with a tech company. Because of your reasoning for firing me. Because you said that I was unstable." His sentence was filled with so much disbelief that Tony interrupted him.

"And you were. You still are. Would a stable person do all of this?" Tony gestured around him.

"People are quick to call those who are willing to do what is necessary 'insane.' Yet those insane people are the only ones able to make a difference in the world."

"Then what do you want to change? What do you deem necessary?"

"I want to change people's views of their heroes. Teach them how flawed their saviors are. But, most of all, I want revenge for the crimes you committed against me."

"Those are some big goals. Though I must say, it would be nearly impossible to change the public's view of the Avengers. Especially only three weeks after we brought back the Vanished."

Beck chuckled again. "You would be surprised. People's opinions change very, very quickly. As a matter of fact, the morning of the day of the Compound Battle, I heard the news talking negatively about the Avengers. Then, that very night, I heard the anchors praising the Avengers, treating them like gods. They place their trust in people who could care less about them; they worship the people that deserve none of it. They love the people that did nothing to achieve it and hate the people that do deserve their love."

"And you're one of those people?"

"I am. I am one of the smart people whose intelligence is looked over in favor of people who've never worked a day in their damn lives!"

His voice had risen to a shout, making Tony raise his eyebrows. "You think it's easy being a superhero?"

"Of course it's easy!"

"You think it's easy keeping the public happy while still doing your job?"

“Of course.” Beck grinned. “What do you think I have been doing all day?”

Suddenly, Tony remembered Pepper’s words when the footage from the bank aired on the news.

*“Beck controls the narrative and he’s going to use the footage to fit in with his motivations.”*

Pepper was right. And Beck’s words just proved it. Beck was controlling the story, giving out certain videos that supported that story. And his motivation was to turn the public against Peter. “So it’s true? You gained access to all the security cameras around the city and gave the news select footage from them?”

“Took you long enough to figure that one out. Yes, I hacked into the camera network, taking it all off of the public channels. Then, I sifted through it, handing out the footage depicting Peter as a villain to various news channels. And within just a few hours, I got the whole city turned against Spider-Man.”

Again, it was true. Tony recalled the words Captain Stacy had said and the news anchor’s slip-up in the story of Peter and the explosion at the school.

*“The video the press has shown more than proves Spider-Man’s guilt.”*

*“The he-excuse me, villain appears to be looking for something.”*

Seemingly overnight, the public had gone from doting on Spider-Man to seeing him as a murderer. No, not overnight. It happened in less than twelve hours. For Tony had just remembered the captain on the picture of Peter and Beck buying lunch from a hot dog stand.

*Just spotted Spider-Man buying lunch with the up-and-coming hero, Mysterio!*

Just that afternoon, people were talking about spotting Peter excitedly. And six hours later, the news was calling Peter a villain and the police captain was calling for Peter’s arrest.

“What are you hoping to accomplish?” Tony asked.

“I already explained, Stark. But I’m more than happy to explain it again.

“I want to see people hate the superheroes we have. I want them to rejoice in my rise as a superhero, give me their love--which should’ve been mine years ago. I want them to hate you, to hate Peter, to hate all the Avengers. And I want revenge. I want to see you just as broken as I was when you took BARF from me. And I know how to do it. In fact, I believe I already have.

“After my firing in 2016, I waited in the background for the perfect time to strike. I schemed on how to hurt you just as much as you hurt me. I heard about the fiasco with the Rogue Avengers--the news is a great informant about that mess--and I thought to myself ‘I don’t have to do anything. Captain America and his band of merry men did the work for me!’ You stopped your work as an Avenger, stopped being Iron Man, stopped doing press conferences. You locked yourself away in your tower, far away from the public eye. But people still talked. They gossiped about your deteriorating health, how you were going insane up there in your tower with the rest of your team--your family--on the run.

“So I stopped planning, I stopped watching. I figured that my revenge had been accomplished; not by me, but by the Rogue Avengers. I moved on with my life, trying to rebuild it, but I found it virtually impossible. You see, being marked as ‘unstable’ by Tony Stark made it impossible for me to find work. I began to grow bitter again.

“Then, I began to hear rumors about a bond growing between you and Spider-Man. I heard about how you two would go into the city to fight crime together. I found out that you were back at being Iron Man. I heard more Accords news, about how you were getting it amended. You were taking up the mantle of being an Avenger again. My revenge, which I thought had been fulfilled months ago, was coming undone right in front of my very eyes.

“And that, coupled with my growing bitterness, made me realize that I still had to have my vengeance. My thirst for revenge still had to be sated. As I sat there, trying to figure out what I had to target to hurt you the most, it hit me: Spider-Man.

“You had appeared to be doing badly for months, but that all changed when you and Spider-Man became friends. When you started to hang out with him, you went back to being Iron Man. You became Iron Man again in order to hang out with the new hero. Then, you went back to being an Avenger by working on the Accords, a set of laws that affected enhanced people, which, by the way, Spider-Man is an enhanced person. You changed because of Spider-Man. The revenge that the Rogue Avengers had done for me was undone because of that stupid spider!

“I figured that if I wanted to undo the positive changes that Spider-Man brought you, I would have to target Spider-Man. With him out of the picture, my revenge would be complete. I began watching the vigilante, began planning the best time and place to strike. And that’s when I figured out who he was.

“Peter Benjamin Parker. Sixteen-years-old. Junior at Midtown School of Science and Technology. Lives with his aunt, May Parker, who is his only living relative. Personal intern for Tony Stark at Stark Industries.

“It was that last bit of information that got me really interested. Personal intern for Tony Stark at Stark Industries. Huh. Last I checked, you hated kids. You hated the very thought of ever getting a personal intern, even if they were the smartest person on the planet. So why in the world would you ever let a kid become your personal intern? Before I made my move, I had to answer that question. Had to figure out just who this kid was to you.

“But it was too late. Thanos killed half of the world in 2018, including your intern, Peter. With his death, all my plans for revenge went down the drain. Any hope of answering my question also died with him. But then, I realized something. I thought that if I targeted Peter, I could get my revenge. Someone else had killed Peter. Someone else had targeted him. Regardless of who, it still happened. Peter was still gone. And for the second time in two years, I thought that my revenge was complete. And it was a sweet, sweet thought. Yet again, you vanished from the world--only this time, you holed yourself up in a cabin upstate. Yet again, I moved on with my life, thinking that all was right with the world. But it wasn’t.

“Five years passed and my life was still in ruins. I traveled from city to city, state to state, looking--pleading--for a job. Yet I found nothing--except for an alien symbiote. I found it out in the desert of New Mexico--found it near Roswell, to be exact. I told everyone in the science field about my discovery, but they simply laughed at me. They took your rumors about my mental state and combined it with my outlandish claims. They told me to stop making things up, to put the slime away and find things of real importance, backed by scientific fact. They ignored my evidence, ignored my logic.

“And then, to top it all off, August 26, 2023 happened. The day that half of the world returned, including your precious personal intern. You got Peter back, got your world back--yet I was back in New York City, out of money and out of any hope of finding work. Everyone praised you, calling you a saint--yet I saw the truth. You took my work and claimed it as your own. You profited from

my work, yet I never saw a cent of that profit. Instead, you got rich while I was shunned by the science community. My hopes for revenge had never been realized, for seven long years. And that's when I came to my final realization.

"If I wanted to have my revenge, I would have to do it myself. I decided to use the alien symbiote, which I named Venom."

Tony looked up at Beck when he said the symbiote's name. It was the same name that Officer Davis had nicknamed the symbiote. Beck didn't seem to notice Tony's shocked face. As he continued speaking.

"But if I really wanted this to work, if I really wanted you to notice that it was *me* doing this, well, I had to befriend Peter. And I did. And, boy, was this kid gullible. All it took was for me to save him from a stabbing"--Tony's heart skipped a beat at the thought of Peter almost being stabbed--"and the kid was practically begging for me to come patrol with him.

"Three days later, I start telling Peter the truth about you. The truth about his aunt and the rest of his family. He didn't believe me, of course. But after a quick visit to your house for the weekend, he saw how accurate my words were. And that's when I introduced Venom to him."

Tony heard Peter move and he looked over to see the kid had turned away from their conversation. It was the most movement he had made during Tony and Beck's conversation and Tony could almost say that the movement was one made out of embarrassment. Almost like Peter was regretting his decision of ignoring Tony's words and was embarrassed that he ever agreed to the symbiote. But Tony didn't blame him. How could he, when the blame was all on him? Pepper's words floated through his head.

*"You had nothing to do with his actions; nothing at all. So you are not allowed to feel guilty for Beck's actions; only he does."*

Right. Peter wasn't to blame for this; Tony wasn't to blame for this; Beck was the one to blame. It was all Beck's fault.

"Peter was against it at first," Beck continued. "But--sorry, I forgot you already know this part, don't you? You found the footage that I left behind?"

Tony's hands clenched as he remembered the video from last Tuesday. Peter's head snapped back to look at Beck and Tony and, for a brief moment, Peter's mask disappeared. His suit flashed back to its normal colors. But as soon as Tony saw it, it went away. The moment was so quick that Tony thought he had imagined it. Tony turned his attention back to Beck.

Beck smiled, noticing Tony's clenched hands. "Yes, judging from your reaction, I would say that you saw my little present. I knew that the city's security cameras wouldn't give you sound, but I figured that, if you had given the kid an AI, logic stated that you had built a recording software within that AI. And it appears that I was correct. Anyways, back to my story.

"For the duration of a week, everything was running smoothly. Peter tells me about his whole family, from May and Happy to you and your daughter. It was insane how easy it was for Peter to trust me with some of his biggest secrets. Things that I'm guessing you didn't know about, seeing as you weren't there to help him through the biggest culture shock Peter has ever experienced. I thought everything would be good and, eventually, Peter would give into the darker side of Venom, and not even realize it. But then you showed up, messing up all my progress.

"After your little spat with Peter, he came to the conclusion that the symbiote was bad. That he

needed to get rid of it. Of course, I was there to help him with that indecision.”

“With a hallucinogen?” Tony snapped. Again, he noticed the way Peter’s crossed arms tightened for a moment. “Yeah, I noticed that part.”

Beck looked shocked that Tony knew about that. “Ho-wh-ever mind. Yes, with the hallucinogen. The symbiote helped with that, too. It helped to alter the hallucinations and show things that it knew would affect Peter the most.” Beck shook his head, seemingly amazed at Venom’s actions. “I don’t know what it showed him--he was saying something about May and MJ being dead”--Tony noticed the way Peter looked down and away from the two of them--“but it was almost scary to see the complete 180 Peter did. Right before the hallucinations took hold, he was telling me that, because it wanted to hurt you, he had to get rid of it. Afterwards, he was saying that he wasn’t Peter, that he was Venom.

“That’s when I knew that I won. Then there was the bank robbery, and Venom-Spider-Man killed that robber. And then, at the school, Venom-Spider-Man caused an explosion, killing twenty-five people. I couldn’t believe it. My plan was unfolding better than I thought that it could. The public was calling Spider-Man a villain; they were starting to see that their heroes aren’t as great as they think. Your intern is turning evil and, after he’s completely gone, I know that my revenge will finally be accomplished.”

“Then why do you need EDITH?” Tony asked. “If your plan is doing well without it, why do you want me to give it to you?”

Beck tilted his head. “I thought it would be clear to see why. EDITH has access to the BARF technology and has more drones than I do to run the illusions.”

“So you’re still going on about your illusions?” Tony rolled his eyes. “Seven years later and you’re still obsessed with BARF?”

Beck clenched his hands. “Yes,” he spat. “I’m still obsessed with BARF. See, this little thing with Venom took forever to accomplish. Three long, tiring weeks. With BARF, I can turn the public’s opinion overnight. Think about it, what would happen if I create illusions that can trick people into thinking that the Avengers have turned into villains? Like Iron Man? Or Scarlet Witch? Or Falcon? Or White Wolf? Or Hawkeye? It would be simple.”

“How do you even know that you can create illusions powerful enough to do that?” Tony asked. If Beck did what he was saying, the results could be terrifying. The Avengers had always stood on thin ice when it came to the public liking them. One wrong move--or the moves that Beck was suggesting--could demolish the Avengers, forever.

“Because I already tested it,” Beck retorted. “On Peter here.”

Tony’s hands clenched and he felt his heart skip a beat. “So, what? It wasn’t enough to drug the kid, you had to use your tech as well? Your tech that has the potential to be a torture device? You know, I’m going to kill you. He’s sixteen! There’s--”

“Oh, please,” Beck said, rolling his eyes. “Nothing as drastic as that. No, I simply created an illusion of a crime. Remember when I said that I saved the kid from a stabbing?”--Tony did. That was the first time that Tony’s heart had skipped a beat during Beck’s story--“Guess what? It was fake.

“I created an illusion of a mugging and, lo and behold, Spider-Man appeared. I watched in the background as the fake-criminal attacked the vigilante. I even made the illusion cut Spidey on his

arm. Spider-Man got confused about that one; it was quite comedic. The fake-criminal was about to kill Spider-Man and that's when I appeared. I 'saved' him and the kid was tripping over himself to become my friend. My illusions continued, and a 'gang' appeared. We easily took care of the illusions--how could we not? They were all fake, after all.

"The best part of the story? Peter believed it. He believed the whole thing." Beck laughed. "I was doubtful of my plans with EDITH and BARF, but, after watching the kid fall for it, I knew it could work. So, yes, I'm positive that no one will see through my lies."

"What about the people you're making the illusions of? The Avengers? *Iron Man*? Beck, I'm sitting right here, listening to your speech, listening to how you will take over the world." And he would've been recording the whole thing--if it wasn't for a pesky EMP.

Beck chuckled. "I know. And I still haven't revealed the best part of this revenge. You're going to die."

"Really? Y'see, a lot of people have told me that in the last few years, yet here I stand."

"That's because they don't know how to do their jobs. But I know. I know how."

Tony rolled his eyes. "I'm done with your cryptic messages. I'm outta here. Peter, come on, we're leaving." He gestured for Peter to follow him. For a moment, he actually believed that Peter would. However, Peter stayed still. In fact, he looked over at *Beck*, seemingly asking for permission. "Kid?"

Beck grinned at Tony. "Peter's mine, Stark."

Tony whirled around to glare at Beck. "He's not anyone's, Beck."

"I still control him." Beck bent down to grab something off the ground. Tony's eyes widened as he saw that it was a gun. Beck stood back up and handed the weapon to Peter. "Kill Stark."

Without any hesitation, Peter took the gun from Beck. He looked down at the gun, but Tony couldn't figure out what the kid was thinking. Was he deciding whether or not to listen to Beck? Was he eager to carry out Beck's command? Or was he fighting it with every fiber of his being? All he saw were the white eyes of Peter's mask. What was going on behind them?

Tony looked at Peter, trying to think of something to say, but nothing came to him. Then, he realized something.

"Beck, you still want EDITH, don't you?" He turned to face the man. "If you kill me, you won't be able to have her. I'm the only person that has access to the AI."

Beck chuckled. "You're forgetting something, aren't you? What about your will? The will that states that, as soon as you pass, EDITH's controls will be given to Peter Parker. Then, the kid will give me access and voila, I have EDITH."

Tony looked back to Peter, his hopes of getting out of here dwindling with Beck's words. Beck was about to win and Tony had no way to prevent that. His suit was still inactive, meaning he had no defense against a bullet. He didn't have the kid's amazing reflexes or his spidey-sense; he couldn't dodge a bullet. And he couldn't use EDITH or his idea because the EMP had definitely fried the two items. Or maybe--Tony shook the unfinished thought away, instead focusing on the situation at hand. "Kid..." Tony started to say. He broke off quickly, realizing that he had no idea what he was going to say. What could he say in this situation?

Peter's head snapped up to stare at Tony. Tony stared directly into the white eyes, willing the kid to understand that everything was going to be okay.

It seemed that the eye contact had shaken Peter, judging by the fact that Peter took a step backward and his hands began to shake.

"Peter," Tony began again, suddenly knowing what to say. "It's okay. Just drop the gun and everything will be okay."

Peter shook his head. He brought the gun up, aiming it at Tony. His hands were shaking worse now, the gun seemingly to aim everywhere as it shook. Peter closed his eyes, but Tony stayed looking at him.

Then, out of nowhere, words flew from Tony's mouth; words that had been on the tip of his tongue in Titan; words that he had wished he said while he mourned Peter; words that he had been meaning to say since Peter came back from the dead.

"I love you, Peter."

Peter's eyes flew open as he stared into Tony's eyes. Tony still couldn't see Peter's real eyes, but he imagined that they were filled with confusion. That image flew out of Tony's mind as he saw Peter's hands grow steady. Tony's words had seemed to only strengthen Peter's resolve, giving him the courage to do what Beck had told him to do.

A part of Tony realized that the suit had changed colors, changed from black to red and blue. His mask had also disappeared, allowing Tony to finally see the kid's face. The change felt significant, felt like Tony was missing a piece in the puzzle. But there wasn't enough time for him to figure out the meaning behind the color change, not when Peter was aiming a gun steadily at him.

Tony closed his eyes as he waited for Peter to pull the trigger. He thought of Morgan and of Pepper; of the life they would have without him. He thought of May, of Happy, and of Peter. God, that kid, the kid who was about to kill him. He knew that Peter would never be able to live with the guilt of that, would never be able to move on from this. But he wished Peter would. Because it wasn't Peter's fault. None of this was and none of this would ever be.

Suddenly, Peter spoke. His voice didn't shake, didn't waver as he spoke. "I love you, too, Mr. Stark."

Tony's eyes flew open in time to see Peter bring the gun up, farther than the height needed to shoot him. Peter's eyes were filled with acceptance and understanding, screaming at Tony himself to understand and accept. And Tony did. He understood that Peter had to kill him and he accepted that fact. That was what he was trying to say when he told Peter that he loved him. So why was the gun rising higher and higher? Why were Peter's eyes screaming at him, when he already knew? Why was his expression so earnest, so demanding about a fact of life that Tony already knew?

It all clicked when the gun stopped. When Peter aimed the gun at his own head.

## Chapter End Notes

Oops? Anyways, I hope everyone has a good New Year's and I'll see you all in the new year! Stay tuned for next week's chapter!



Notice: No update Wednesday, Jan. 5

# Chapter Seventeen

## Chapter Notes

Good morning, everyone, and happy New Year! I'm so sorry for not updating last week; there was a major snowstorm that knocked my power out for two days so I couldn't get it edited in time. Also, I've been nominated for the IronDad Creator Awards!! Thank you to whoever nominated me; it means so much to me! I hope y'all enjoy this week's chapter!

TW: Suicide at the very end.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## Part Five

*There's nothing wrong with just a taste of what you paid for*

*Tuesday, September 19, 2023*

Peter felt like he was trapped in a never ending nightmare. It had started when he saw May die and when he saw MJ die, but it only got more nightmarish as the sun set and night began. As hard as he tried, he just couldn't seem to wake up. He watched, feeling like he was outside of his body, as he held a gun. He tried to scream as he brought the gun up, aiming it at a robber. He tried to stop himself from pulling the trigger, but, like what happened up on the roof following his argument with Mr. Stark, he couldn't control his body. It was the symbiote controlling him, yet again. Only, this time, it was much, much scarier.

After shooting four people, people that Peter was praying were still alive, Peter swung away. He fought internally against the symbiote, trying desperately to gain control, but to no avail. He watched as the symbiote exploded a school, no doubt killing the criminals inside. And he felt himself smile as he watched the building explode. Internally, though, there was no glee at having killed those people. No, internally he was screaming at the top of his lungs, sick at what he had done.

For this was all his fault. He had agreed to let the symbiote control him, he was the one letting all this happen. He even knew that it was a bad idea to accept the symbiote, but he did it anyways. And all for selfish reasons. He wanted to become a better Spider-Man, since that was the only thing Mr. Stark seemed to care about. He wanted to be able to save other people, the way he couldn't for MJ and May. But what he was doing wasn't what Spider-Man stood for. What he was doing wasn't saving people; it was killing people.

***But their criminals***, the symbiote said. ***They deserve to die.***

Peter died once. He remembered the pain that was dying. And no one deserved that, whether they were bad people or good people. And, at the end of the day, everyone had a side to them that was good, including criminals, and Peter didn't want to kill their chance at becoming good again. So Peter always, always strived to never kill anyone, not if he could help it. And, tonight, the symbiote wasn't following his ideals. Peter knew better than to accept the symbiote, yet he did it anyways. And now people were dying, and it was all his fault.

Sometime later--how much later Peter wasn't certain--Mr. Beck landed on a roof, snapping Peter out of his thoughts. He watched as he landed beside the man.

"Peter," Mr. Beck asked. "What can you tell me about Stark's surveillance system?"

Peter understood what the man was asking. Mr. Beck wanted to know if Mr. Stark was watching them. He knew that Mr. Beck had hacked into the cameras around the city--he knew that because he helped the man do so after his conversation with the symbiote. But if he helped Mr. Beck work around Mr. Stark's cameras, then all hope for Peter was lost. If he couldn't stop the symbiote himself and Mr. Stark couldn't find him, then the symbiote had free-reign on the destruction of the city. And that couldn't happen, not if Peter could help it. So he elected to not answer the question.

But the symbiote was still in control and had access to his memories.

***"Stark has many, many cameras,"*** it said, using his mouth. ***"In fact, he has access to a whole satellite filled with them."***

"And what controls those drones?"

Again, that was a question that Peter didn't want to answer. Mr. Beck didn't need to know anything about Mr. Stark's technology. But, again, he couldn't stop the symbiote from answering.

***"EDITH."***

Mr. Beck turned around. "EDITH? The AI he created to run BARF?"

***"Yes. Stark changed the coding inside of EDITH, using her to run his drones and the Stark satellite system. It has mis--"*** For a brief moment, Peter was able to regain control of his body, stopping the symbiote before it could tell Mr. Beck too much information--information that could be deadly.

"What were you about to say?"

Peter still had control of his body; the symbiote was gone--for the time being. He shook his head. "Nothing."

Mr. Beck stepped forward, moving closer to Peter. "Don't lie to me, Peter. What were you about to say?"

Peter stepped backwards hurriedly. "I already told you, not--"

"And I already told you, don't lie to me!" Mr. Beck yelled. "And stop fighting the symbiote!"

Peter froze, looking at the man in fear. Gone was the easy, joking personality of a hero. Now, Beck was harsh and controlling. Peter cursed his naïve self for not noticing the reality of his so-called friend. Mr. Stark was right from the beginning: Peter should have stayed far, far away from the man.

***Stop crying about spilled milk,*** the symbiote said. ***What's done is done.***

*And?* Peter snapped back. *I can still fix this! But only if you're not in the picture. So, ge--*

***"Shut up!"*** the symbiote shouted out loud. And, just as suddenly as before, Peter found himself not in control of his body. ***"Missiles,"*** the symbiote said, answering Beck's question. ***"EDITH has control of missiles."***

“Interesting. They might be helpful in the future.” And that was what was scaring Peter. “Peter, I want you to hack into Stark’s drones. Get their locations. I want to send Stark a video.”

Peter felt his blood chill. What was Beck planning? ***“How are we supposed to hack into it?”***

Beck tilted his head. “I guess that is a problem, isn’t it?” The man pulled a tablet out of his pocket. He quickly started tapping on it, no doubt pulling something up. Suddenly, he thrust the tablet into Peter’s hands. Peter looked down at it, shock blooming inside of him as he saw a control panel of a SI drone in front of him.

Even though he didn’t voice his shock, Beck smirked--no doubt guessing Peter’s emotions correctly. “I got about a dozen of Stark’s drones. I stole them when I left SI. Stark didn’t even notice. For all the talk about his intelligence, he can be an idiot sometimes. Can you use that to hack into the rest of Stark’s drones?”

***“Easily,”*** the symbiote responded. Without his doing, Peter’s hands started flying across the tablet, opening and closing screens faster than Peter thought was possible. While Ned was more into computers than Peter was--his friend was called “guy in the chair” for a reason--Peter was still able to maneuver around computers. Most of his knowledge also came from Mr. Stark--the person behind the coding he was currently trying to hack. He knew Mr. Stark’s coding style, making it ten times easier to get into the surveillance system.

Sure enough, not even five minutes later, Peter was looking at a map filled with green dots. They were all steady green, meaning none of them were blinking. Suddenly, Peter understood what that meant. ***“Done,”*** the symbiote said. ***“We are currently in a blind spot, so Stark does not know where we are.”***

“Let’s change that,” Beck said. “Send a drone over here, right in front of me.”

Peter’s fingers quickly tapped out the commands to do so. ***“Drone 84 on its way.”*** A few minutes later, Peter watched as one of the green lights started blinking. He clicked on the live feed from the camera, watching as he and Beck popped up onto the tablet’s screen. ***“We’re live.”***

Surprisingly, the symbiote placed the tablet on the ground instead of giving it back to Beck. Beck didn’t comment on it, looking forward at the invisible drone in front of them. Suddenly, Peter felt his neck prickle--signaling that his spidey-sense was going off. Peter assumed that it meant that Mr. Stark was accessing the drone’s camera. ***“They’re watching,”*** the symbiote whispered to Beck.

Instead of asking Peter how he knew that, Beck launched into his speech--a moment he was obviously planning for a long time.

“Hello, Stark,” Beck said. “I’m sure you’re wondering how I managed to find your drones. Well, you see, it’s easy. Especially when I have an intern from SI with me. Yes, Peter here helped me hack into your system.”

“But I’m getting ahead of myself. We can talk about your tech in a moment. I understand that my friend’s antics have been bothering you”--Beck gestured to Peter. For a brief moment, Peter gained control again, twitching at Beck’s words. His “antics” were not only bothering Mr. Stark, but himself as well--“and I’m willing to offer a deal for you. Pete here will stop all the senseless killings and you will give me EDITH.”

It was a deal where, either way, Beck won. Peter wanted to stop the violence--it was absolutely senseless--but not at the cost of Mr. Stark giving up EDITH. And if Mr. Stark refused to give EDITH, then it was possible that more people could be killed. There had to be another way.

Beck chuckled. “You’re surprised, aren’t you? You should’ve hidden your work better, Stark. Seriously, how blind do you think I am? I noticed the AI you were building when I was working on BARF. And I took special notice when you put my work and your AI into those *stupid* glasses!” Beck’s voice had risen into a shout at the very end, but he quickly schooled his expression. Just like all the other times Beck switched his emotions effortlessly, Peter was thrown off guard. “I shrugged off my concerns, though. After all, you’re the great Tony Stark. You have a perfectly good reason for everything you do.” The disdain in Beck’s tone made it impossible to believe him. “But I couldn’t stop myself when I found out what you were planning to do with EDITH. Or, to speak more plainly, who you were planning on gifting her to. *Him*.”

“But, yet again, I’m getting far, far ahead of myself. We don’t need to get into this right now, not when I can’t see your facial expressions. You meet me here, at this rooftop, in ten minutes. Come alone and bring EDITH with you. Or you can say bye-bye to Petey here.” Beck waved, laughing as he did so. Peter’s blood chilled. Beck wasn’t planning on letting Peter continue killing people—he was planning on killing Peter if Mr. Stark didn’t give him EDITH. And Peter knew that Mr. Stark would do the exact thing that Peter didn’t want him to do. After a few seconds, Beck stopped waving and turned back around to face Peter.

“Cut the drone’s feed off,” the man said. “I don’t want anyone watching this.”

Peter picked up the tablet from the ground, his fingers flying across it. After he was done, he placed it back on the ground next to him. ***“The camera has been turned off.”***

“Good,” Beck said, looking back at the invisible drone. “He should be here soon.”

*And that is what I’m afraid of*, Peter thought, unable to say the words out loud thanks to the symbiote. *Because Mr. Stark is willing to give you EDITH in order to save me.*

...

True to Beck’s words, Mr. Stark was there soon after—less than ten minutes, just as Beck said. Peter heard him before he saw him. His ears picked up the sound of repulsors—a sound that made him wince. He knew that Mr. Stark wasn’t allowed to be in the suit, yet he was, for Peter. He was willing to hurt his shoulder even more, for Peter. Peter’s guilt increased—if that was even possible. After a few seconds, Peter spotted him as he landed in front of Peter and Beck.

“Stark,” Beck said. “Nice of you to finally join us.”

“As if you gave me a choice,” Mr. Stark retorted, before focusing on Peter. “Peter?” Peter tried to move forward, to respond to Mr. Stark’s question, but the symbiote didn’t let him.

Beck rolled his eyes. “I didn’t call you here to talk with Peter. And besides, he can’t hear you.”

*Yes, I can!* Peter thought. Mr. Stark gave him one last look before looking at Beck again. The look was enough for Peter to know that Mr. Stark knew that Beck was lying. “Let me guess, the symbiote?”

Beck blinked in surprise. “You know about the symbiote?”

“Apparently.” Internally, Peter was smiling. He loved to hear Mr. Stark talk with villains—the snark was fantastic. “Get rid of the alien.”

“First, you give me EDITH.”

Peter saw Mr. Stark reach for his hip—the same exact spot where his pocket was. Mr. Stark had

brought EDITH. And it was currently sitting in his pocket. "I don't think so."

Beck tilted his head to the side. "I told you that giving me EDITH is the only way to keep Peter safe. Are you backing out of that deal?"

*Yes*, Peter thought. *Yes, Mr. Stark. Do--*

"Perhaps," Mr. Stark said, making Peter internally groan. "It depends on how you answer my questions." The billionaire crossed his arms.

Beck chuckled. "I guess it's only fair. Though I think it would be easier for us to talk if you step out of your suit."

"And make it easy for you to kill me?" Suddenly, Peter's fear increased--but not for his safety. No, he was fearful for Mr. Stark's safety. "I don't think so."

"It wasn't a question," Beck said, holding up a remote. "This button right here will set off an EMP that will shut down your suit. So, I will ask you again: Step out of your suit if you want to talk."

Peter hoped that Mr. Stark wouldn't follow through with Beck's request, for the exact reason the billionaire had stated earlier. But, at the same time, he hoped he would, for the EMP would probably knock out power to the area around them--and he knew that there was a hospital a block away, the same hospital his aunt used to work at. While they did have a backup generator, there was a chance the EMP would knock it out as well. And even if it didn't, it would run for only so many hours. It would take the civil engineers time to get the power back online--maybe longer than the generator would run for. Which meant that there was a chance that the hospital would have no power, a very scary possibility and one that had to be avoided at all costs.

But Peter couldn't do anything about it; only Mr. Stark. Which brought Peter's attention back to the billionaire.

"No," he said, simply and without any room for disagreement.

Beck grinned. "Very well, then." He pressed the button. For a second, Peter hoped against hope that nothing would happen. But something did happen.

The suit completely disappeared from around Mr. Stark. It left Mr. Stark standing in his street clothes, a faded band shirt and worn jeans. His face appeared surprised and Peter could see the undercurrent of fear behind the billionaire's brown eyes. Peter felt a stab of guilt as he realized that the fear was there because of him. But he also felt confused as he picked up on the guilt in the man's expression. What was there for him to feel guilty about? Wasn't this all Peter's fault? And if that was true, then the billionaire shouldn't have anything to feel guilty about.

Mr. Stark wiped his hands and every emotion on his face disappeared, leaving only anger in its place. "Anyways," the billionaire said. "I have some questions for you. Mainly, why?"

Beck seemed pleased with the subject change. "Now that is quite a story, a story that I think you already know."

"Humor me, won't you?"

"Very well. Seven years ago, I finished work on a piece of hologram technology. It had massive amounts of potential, yet none of it was achieved. Because of you. You were the one who decided to turn my weapon into a therapy machine. You named my tech BARF, turning it into a laughing stock. You told the whole world about my technology, yet you never gave me any credit. No, you

fired me, ruined my prospects of ever getting another job with a tech company. Because of your reasoning for firing me. Because you said that I was unstable.”

“And you were. You still are. Would a stable person do all of this?” Mr. Stark gestured around him.

“People are quick to call those who are willing to do what is necessary ‘insane.’ Yet those insane people are the only ones able to make a difference in the world.”

“Then what do you want to change? What do you deem necessary?”

“I want to change people’s views of their heroes. Teach them how flawed their saviors are. But, most of all, I want revenge for the crimes you committed against me.”

“Those are some big goals. Though I must say, it would be nearly impossible to change the public’s view of the Avengers. Especially only three weeks after we brought back the Vanished.”

Beck chuckled again. “You would be surprised. People’s opinions change very, very quickly. As a matter of fact, the morning of the Compound Battle, I heard the news talking negatively about the Avengers. Then, that very night, I heard the anchors praising the Avengers, treating them like gods. They place their trust in people who could care less about them; they worship the people that deserve none of it. They love the people that did nothing to achieve it and hate the people that do deserve their love.”

“And you’re one of those people?”

“I am. I am one of the smart people whose intelligence is looked over in favor of people who’ve never worked a day in their damn lives!” His voice had risen to a shout.

Mr. Stark raised his eyebrows. “You think it’s easy being a superhero?”

“Of course it’s easy!”

“You think it’s easy keeping the public happy while still doing your job?”

“Of course.” Beck grinned. “What do you think I have been doing all day?”

Peter was confused. What was Beck talking about?

“So it’s true?” Mr. Stark asked. “You gained access to all the security cameras around the city and gave the news select footage from them?”

Peter’s confusion only grew. What footage was the billionaire talking about?

“Took you long enough to figure that one out. Yes, I hacked into the camera network”--internally, Peter scoffed; he was the one to hack into the network, not Beck--“taking it all off of the public channels. Then, I sifted through it, handing out the footage depicting Peter as a villain to various news channels. And within just a few hours, I got the whole city turned against Spider-Man.”

Suddenly, Peter’s questions were answered. The news was reporting on him. The news was reporting on his murders. And if the whole city believed that Spider-Man was a villain, then how was Peter supposed to be a hero again?

“What are you hoping to accomplish?” Mr. Stark asked.

“I already explained, Stark. But I’m more than happy to explain it again.

“After my firing in 2016, I waited in the background for the perfect time to strike. I schemed on how to hurt you just as much as you hurt me. I heard about the fiasco with the Rogue Avengers--the news is a great informant about that mess--and I thought to myself ‘I don’t have to do anything. Captain America and his band of merry men did the work for me!’ You stopped your work as an Avenger, stopped being Iron Man, stopped doing press conferences. You locked yourself away in your tower, far away from the public eye. But people still talked. They gossiped about your deteriorating health, how you were going insane up there in your tower with the rest of your team--your family--on the run.

“So I stopped planning, I stopped watching. I figured that my revenge had been accomplished; not by me, but by the Rogue Avengers. I moved on with my life, trying to rebuild it, but I found it virtually impossible. You see, being marked as ‘unstable’ by Tony Stark made it impossible for me to find work. I began to grow bitter again.

“Then, I began to hear rumors about a bond growing between you and Spider-Man. I heard about how you two would go into the city to fight crime together. I found out that you were back at being Iron Man. I heard more Accords news, about how you were getting it amended. You were taking up the mantle of being an Avenger again. My revenge, which I thought had been fulfilled months ago, was coming undone right in front of my very eyes.

“And that, coupled with my growing bitterness, made me realize that I still had to have my vengeance. My thirst for revenge still had to be sated. As I sat there, trying to figure out what I had to target to hurt you the most, it hit me: Spider-Man.

“You had appeared to be doing badly for months, but that all changed when you and Spider-Man became friends. When you started to hang out with him, you went back to being Iron Man. You became Iron Man again in order to hang out with the new hero. Then, you went back to being an Avenger by working on the Accords, a set of laws that affected enhanced people, which, by the way, Spider-Man is an enhanced person. You changed because of Spider-Man. The revenge that the Rogue Avengers had done for me was undone because of that stupid spider!

“I figured that if I wanted to undo the positive changes that Spider-Man brought you, I would have to target Spider-Man. With him out of the picture, my revenge would be complete. I began watching the vigilante, began planning the best time and place to strike. And that’s when I figured out who he was.

“Peter Benjamin Parker. Sixteen-years-old. Junior at Midtown School of Science and Technology. Lives with his aunt, May Parker, who is his only living relative. Personal intern for Tony Stark at Stark Industries.”

Peter became shocked. Beck had already known his identity, before Peter had told him? From their very first meeting, Beck knew everything about him? And if he knew, then how many other people knew who he was? Lost in his thoughts, Peter missed Beck’s next few words.

“--ecked, you hated kids. You hated the very thought of ever getting a personal intern, even if they were the smartest person on the planet. So why in the world would you ever let a kid become your personal intern? Before I made my move, I had to answer that question. Had to figure out just who this kid was to you.

“But it was too late. Thanos killed half of the world in 2018, including your intern, Peter. With his death, all my plans for revenge went down the drain. Any hope of answering my question also died with him. But then, I realized something. I thought that if I targeted Peter, I could get my revenge. Someone else had killed Peter. Someone else had targeted him. Regardless of who, it still happened. Peter was still gone. And for the second time in two years, I thought that my revenge



was complete. And it was a sweet, sweet thought. Yet again, you vanished from the world--only this time, you holed yourself up in a cabin upstate. Yet again, I moved on with my life, thinking that all was right with the world. But it wasn't.

"Five years passed and my life was still in ruins. I traveled from city to city, state to state, looking--pleading--for a job. Yet I found nothing--except for an alien symbiote. I found it out in the desert of New Mexico--found it near Roswell, to be exact. I told everyone in the science field about my discovery, but they simply laughed at me. They took your rumors about my mental state and combined it with my outlandish claims. They told me to stop making things up, to put the slime away and find things of real importance, backed by scientific fact. They ignored my evidence, ignored my logic.

"And then, to top it all off, August 26, 2023 happened. The day that half of the world returned, including your precious personal intern. You got Peter back, got your world back--yet I was back in New York City, out of money and out of any hope of finding work. Everyone praised you, calling you a saint--yet I saw the truth. You took my work and claimed it as your own. You profited from my work, yet I never saw a cent of that profit. Instead, you got rich while I was shunned by the science community. My hopes for revenge had never been realized, for seven long years. And that's when I came to my final realization.

"If I wanted to have my revenge, I would have to do it myself. I decided to use the alien symbiote, which I named Venom. But if I really wanted this to work, if I really wanted you to notice that it was *me* doing this, well, I had to befriend Peter. And I did. And, boy, was this kid gullible. All it took was for me to save him from a stabbing"--Peter noticed the way that Mr. Stark glanced suddenly at him before looking back at Beck--"and the kid was practically begging for me to come patrol with him.

"Three days later, I start telling Peter the truth about you. The truth about his aunt and the rest of his family. He didn't believe me, of course. But after a quick visit to your house for the weekend, he saw how accurate my words were. And that's when I introduced Venom to him." Peter became embarrassed remembering how easy it was for him to accept the symbiote. Yes, he had refused in the first place, but it took very little for Beck to convince him. Now, he wanted nothing else but the symbiote to leave him alone. He regretted every single thing the symbiote made him do, blaming himself for the pain and suffering it caused.

"Peter was against it at first," Beck continued. "But--sorry, I forgot you already know this part, don't you? You found the footage that I left behind?"

*What?* Peter thought. Mr. Stark knew about their conversation last week? He saw and heard their conversation? Peter noticed the way Mr. Stark's hands clenched. He was upset at Peter; upset by him figuring out the things the billionaire hid from him; upset by him knowing Mr. Stark's real emotions towards him.

Beck smiled, seemingly also noticing Mr. Stark's clenched hands. "Yes, judging from your reaction, I would say that you saw my little present. I knew that the city's security cameras wouldn't give you sound, but I figured that, if you had given the kid an AI, logic stated that you had built a recording software within that AI. And it appears that I was correct. Anyways, back to my story.

"For the duration of a week, everything was running smoothly. Peter tells me about his whole family, from May"--Peter internally winced at the mention of his dead aunt--"and Happy to you and your daughter. It was insane how easy it was for Peter to trust me with some of his biggest secrets. Things that I'm guessing you didn't know about, seeing as you weren't there to help him

through the biggest culture shock Peter has ever experienced. I thought everything would be good and, eventually, Peter would give into the darker side of Venom, and not even realize it. But then you showed up, messing up all my progress.

“After your little spat with Peter, he came to the conclusion that the symbiote was bad. That he needed to get rid of it. Of course, I was there to help him with that indecision.”

“With a hallucinogen?” Mr. Stark snapped. Peter got confused. What was the billionaire talking about? “Yeah, I noticed that part.”

Beck looked confused as well. “Ho-wh-ever mind. Yes, with the hallucinogen. The symbiote helped with that, too. It helped to alter the hallucinations and show things that it knew would affect Peter the most.” Peter’s confusion only grew. Was it possible that the things he saw earlier in the day were fake? They never happened? “I don’t know what it showed him--he was saying something about May and MJ being dead”--Peter remembered the dead bodies of his aunt and his crush--“but it was almost scary to see the complete 180 Peter did. Right before the hallucinations took hold, he was telling me that, because it wanted to hurt you, he had to get rid of it. Afterwards, he was saying that he wasn’t Peter, that he was Venom.

“That’s when I knew that I won. Then there was the bank robbery, and Venom-Spider-Man killed that robber. And then, at the school, Venom-Spider-Man caused an explosion, killing twenty-five people. I couldn’t believe it. My plan was unfolding better than I thought that it could. The public was calling Spider-Man a villain; they were starting to see that their heroes aren’t as great as they think. Your intern is turning evil and, after he’s completely gone, I know that my revenge will finally be accomplished.”

“Then why do you need EDITH?” Mr. Stark asked. “If your plan is doing well without it, why do you want me to give it to you?”

Beck tilted his head. “I thought it would be clear to see why. EDITH has access to the BARF technology and has more drones than I do to run the illusions.”

“So you’re still going on about your illusions?” Mr. Stark asked, rolling his eyes. “Seven years later and you’re still obsessed with BARF?”

Beck clenched his hands. “Yes,” he spat. “I’m still obsessed with BARF. See, this little thing with Venom took forever to accomplish. Three long, tiring weeks. With BARF, I can turn the public’s opinion overnight. Think about it, what would happen if I create illusions that can trick people into thinking that the Avengers have turned into villains? Like Iron Man? Or Scarlet Witch? Or Falcon? Or White Wolf? Or Hawkeye? It would be simple.”

“How do you even know that you can create illusions powerful enough to do that?” Mr. Stark asked.

“Because I already tested it,” Beck retorted. “On Peter here.”

*When?* Peter wanted to ask but, thanks to the symbiote, he was unable to voice it. He noticed Mr. Stark clenching his hands again. “So, what? It wasn’t enough to drug the kid, you had to use your tech as well? Your tech that has the potential to be a torture device? You know, I’m going to kill you. He’s sixteen! There’s--”

“Oh, please,” Beck said, rolling his eyes. Peter grew confused at Mr. Stark’s reaction. He was acting almost like, well, like he *cared* about Peter. He knew that couldn’t be true; knew that Mr. Stark only cared about Spider-Man, yet the man’s words didn’t match with what Peter knew.

Before Peter could decipher what that meant, Beck continued talking. “Nothing as drastic as that. No, I simply created an illusion of a crime. Remember when I said that I saved the kid from a stabbing?”--Peter remembered that day; it was when he first met Beck--“Guess what? It was fake.” Not only did Beck lie to Peter about not knowing him, Beck had lied in their very first meeting. Their whole entire friendship had been a lie from the very start. Peter should’ve realized it. He should’ve listened to Mr. Stark’s warnings from the very beginning.

“I created an illusion of a mugging and, lo and behold, Spider-Man appeared. I watched in the background as the fake-criminal attacked the vigilante. I even made the illusion cut Spidey on his arm. Spider-Man got confused about that one; it was quite comedic. The fake-criminal was about to kill Spider-Man and that’s when I appeared. I ‘saved’ him and the kid was tripping over himself to become my friend. My illusions continued, and a ‘gang’ appeared. We easily took care of the illusions--how could we not? They were all fake, after all.

“The best part of the story? Peter believed it. He believed the whole thing.” Beck laughed. “I was doubtful of my plans with EDITH and BARF, but, after watching the kid fall for it, I knew it could work. So, yes, I’m positive that no one will see through my lies.”

“What about the people you’re making the illusions of? The Avengers? *Iron Man*? Beck, I’m sitting right here, listening to your speech, listening to how you will take over the world.”

Beck chuckled. “I know. And I still haven’t revealed the best part of this revenge. You’re going to die.”

“Really? Y’see, a lot of people have told me that in the last few years, yet here I stand.” Despite the fear Peter felt building inside of him, he couldn’t help but laugh in his head (the symbiote was still making it impossible to control his own body movements) at Mr. Stark’s words. Yet he still saw through it; he still saw the fear in the way he was holding himself and in his words. Mr. Stark was a lot like Peter (or maybe it was the other way around?), making jokes as a way to hide his concern.

“That’s because they don’t know how to do their jobs. But I know. I know how.”

Mr. Stark rolled his eyes. “I’m done with your cryptic messages. I’m outta here. Peter, come on, we’re leaving.” Peter tried to push through the symbiote’s control, desperate to leave this walking nightmare behind, hand-in-hand with the billionaire. But the symbiote didn’t let him, instead making him look over at Beck “Kid?”

Beck grinned at Mr. Stark. “Peter’s mine, Stark.”

Mr. Stark whirled around. Peter could feel the anger radiating off of the billionaire’s death glare that he was sending Beck. “He’s not anyone’s, Beck.”

“I still control him.” Beck bent down to grab a gun from off the ground. Peter intently stared at the gun, watching as Beck stood back up and handed it to him. “Kill Stark.”

Every fiber of his being fought against Beck’s command, knowing that he could not, under any circumstances, follow through with it. Even though he knew the truth behind Mr. Stark’s actions, he still didn’t want to kill his former mentor. But the symbiote didn’t care. Peter could feel the gleefulness in the symbiote inside of him, eager to kill another person. The symbiote took the gun from Beck. Peter--for the millionth time that day--felt like he was watching himself from the outside as he looked down at the gun. He couldn’t kill Mr. Stark. Even though he knew that the man didn’t care about him (but even that truth seemed false. If he didn’t care about him, then why was he here?) and that he was planning on stealing his work (did he, though? Was there an honest

reason behind that?), Peter couldn't kill him in cold-blood. He couldn't even bear the fact that he killed strangers, let alone someone he knew and, dare he say it, had loved. (Or maybe he still loved Mr. Stark?)

Mr. Stark looked about as frozen as Peter felt. But, he snapped out of it, seemingly coming up with a plan. And that simple fact made Peter's fear go away.

"Beck, you still want EDITH, don't you?" He turned to face the man. "If you kill me, you won't be able to have her. I'm the only person that has access to the AI."

Beck chuckled. "You're forgetting something, aren't you? What about your will? The will that states that, as soon as you pass, EDITH's controls will be given to Peter Parker. Then, the kid will give me access and voila, I have EDITH."

Peter's fear came back, even stronger than before. There was no way out of this. Mr. Stark didn't have a plan and Peter couldn't gain control of his own body. Mr. Stark was about to die and it would all be Peter's fault.

"Kid..." Mr. Stark said, his sentence quickly breaking off. It was one word, one broken word, yet it was all it took for Peter's heart to break into a million pieces. Peter looked at Mr. Stark, and the sight of the billionaire's face broke him even further. He stepped backwards, feeling his arms beginning to shake. The man's eyes were filled with tears and the fear Peter had seen earlier was flooding through them.

"Peter," Mr. Stark said. "It's okay. Just drop the gun and everything will be okay."

Peter shook his head. How could the billionaire say that, when Peter was about to kill him? When Peter couldn't control his own arm? The symbiote forced the gun up, aiming it at Mr. Stark's chest. Peter's breath started quickening and his heart began to beat wildly out of control. His hands shook even more, his finger inching towards the trigger.

*No!* Peter thought. He couldn't let the symbiote kill Mr. Stark. He couldn't let his finger pull the trigger. He closed his eyes, trying to stop the symbiote. Mr. Stark cou--

"I love you, Peter."

And, just like that, Peter realized that Mr. Stark really, truly cared about him. He cared enough to be here right now, scared for him and in a suit that could harm his hurt shoulder even more. He knew that Mr. Stark had never been planning on stealing his work. Peter's eyes flew open, staring into Mr. Stark's brown eyes. They were filled with love, with acceptance, with calmness. And just like that, Peter was back in control of his own body. The love, acceptance, and calmness in Mr. Stark's eyes filled his entire being, his hands growing steady. He knew how to end all of this, how to get rid of the symbiote. He knew that Mr. Stark wouldn't like it, but that didn't mean that it wasn't an option. No, it was the only option. He noticed Mr. Stark's eyes close, but Peter spoke anyways, wanting--no, *needing* --to respond to the declaration that his mentor had just made.

"I love you, too, Mr. Stark."

Because it was true. Peter had loved Mr. Stark and he still loved Mr. Stark. His voice didn't shake, didn't waver, only filled with calmness and acceptance with what he was about to do. He saw Mr. Stark's eyes flying open at his own declaration of love, seeing the concern flooding into his brown eyes. He stared into them, as he brought the gun up for the second time. He heard the symbiote shrieking in his head as he fought against it, as it lost the mental battle with him. He stared into his mentor's eyes as he brought the gun up for the second time. And he filled the stare with as many

unspoken things as he could, willing Mr. Stark to understand his decision. His mentor probably didn't agree with it (oh, who was he kidding. Mr. Stark was *definitely* against this), but Peter wanted him to accept it was the only way.

Peter continued staring at Mr. Stark as he aimed the gun at his own head. He only closed them when he touched the trigger with his finger.

## Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed the chapter! Stay tuned for next week's chapter, which will be the final fight!

# Chapter Eighteen

## Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday! I hope you guys have had a good week! Please note, I rewrote the last half of this chapter this past week. My writing style has changed a lot between now and when I first wrote this story, so I hope the shift in writing style isn't too jarring. If it is, I apologize for that. Anyways, I hope y'all like this week's chapter!

TW: Some brief suicidal mentions, but nothing as bad as the last two chapters.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### Part Five

*There's nothing wrong with just a taste of what you paid for*

*Tuesday, September 19, 2023*

Everything had slowed the moment Peter had raised the gun. Yet it all sped up, feeling like time had decided to fast forward, the moment Peter's finger touched the trigger. Everything around Tony disappeared, leaving him focused on one thing and one thing only: Peter.

"No!" Tony shouted, running forward. He didn't know what he was planning; he knew that Peter was stronger than him so there was no way he would be able to wrestle the gun out of the kid's hands; he knew that he didn't have his suit, didn't have any access to anything that could help him in this situation--all thanks to that stupid, stupid EMP. But running towards the kid felt a whole lot better than just standing, watching helplessly as Peter killed himself.

He reached Peter, barreling into him. The two of them fell on the ground, a cry torn from Peter's lips as his back hit the ground. Tony winced, knowing that he had caused that. Somehow, Peter had managed to keep his grip on the gun--probably because of his spidery skills that Morgan was desperate to see. Still pinning the kid to the ground with his body weight, Tony reached for the gun in Peter's left hand, trying to pry it from Peter's grasp before he could make any more stupid decisions with it.

Peter's grip tightened and he tried to push the gun out of his reach. But he couldn't do much to get out of his reach, as he was pinned to the ground by Tony. Realizing this, Peter used his legs to flip their positions, Tony stuck underneath Peter. Tony cursed Natasha, knowing that she had to be the one who had taught that move to Peter before Titan and Vormir had happened. Tony tried to reach up for the gun, still intent on taking it away from Peter. Before he could even get close enough, Peter webbed his prosthetic arm to the ground and used his free hand to keep the other arm down. Tony pulled the arm away but, as he had feared earlier, Peter was just too strong for him.

"Sorry, Mr. Stark," Peter said, actually sounding truly sincere in his apology. He raised the gun up, seemingly still intent on his mission to kill himself.

"Peter, stop!" Tony yelled. He pushed against the webbing on his arm.

But Peter only shook his head, tears filling his eyes and falling onto Tony. "I'm sorry, Mr. Stark, but thi--"

His words were torn away from him as a second force rammed into him. Still mindful of his webbed up arm, Tony sat up, trying to see what had just happened.

Beck had happened. The man had the same goal as Tony, or so it seemed from the way he was trying to take the gun out of Peter's hand. It struck Tony as ironic that Beck had been the one to give the gun to the kid and now he was desperately trying to get it back. The irony hit even harder when he remembered Beck's earlier words.

*"I still control him."* Apparently not, if he was exchanging blows with the kid.

Unsurprisingly, Beck was obviously not equipped to fight the kid. The EMP that had affected Tony's tech had also affected Beck's tech, for his iconic green mist was nowhere to be seen. Having no mist, Beck was forced to fight hand-to-hand with the kid, a skill he did not have. The lack of skill was apparent as he faced the kid, who, Tony was proud to say, excelled at hand-to-hand. It was a skill that he practiced two times a week with Natasha before Titan and a skill that was greatly helped by his spidey-sense.

Every punch that Beck threw was blocked by Peter and, for every punch that Beck dodged, two more hit him. A couple more seconds of the fight and Beck would be done for. Which meant that, with Beck about to be down and Tony stuck to the ground, ten feet away from the fight, nothing would stand in the way between Peter and killing himself. Tony had to do something.

But, in order to do something, he would need his tech.

Tony tapped on the nanotech housing unit, hoping that it would do something. As he was expecting, nothing happened. He glanced at the arc reactor, whose light was nonexistent. He hit that a couple of times, a technique that he knew would do nothing. He thought he saw it light up for a split second before disappearing again, but he suspected that that was just his imagination playing tricks on him. Suddenly, he heard a shout from the fight happening in front of him. Tony's head snapped up.

As he knew would happen, Peter had won the fight. Beck was on the ground, holding his bleeding nose. Judging from its crooked appearance, it was broken. Peter stood in front of him, breathing hard. And that was when Tony noticed where the gun was currently placed. On the ground, finally out of Peter's grasp.

It seemed that Beck had noticed the gun the same moment Tony did. He glanced at the gun and glanced back up at Peter. Seeing the glance, Peter looked away from Beck and his gaze landed on the abandoned gun. While the kid wasn't watching him, Beck took the opportunity to scramble up, heading towards the gun.

"Peter!" Tony yelled, terrified for what Beck would do once he got to the gun.

Peter's head snapped away from the gun, noticing Beck running for the weapon. He ran to Beck, pushing him to the ground. Rather than staying down, Beck got back up again, still reaching for the gun on the ground. Peter pushed him away again, this time harder.

And not a little bit harder. No, Peter used considerable strength when pushing Beck. Enough force for the man to fly through the air and hit a brick wall. He hit the wall with a cry of pain and tumbled to the ground. He stayed on the ground, ominously still. Tony watched the man's chest, desperately hoping to see it rise and fall.

But there was no movement. Beck was dead and Peter had killed him. Not the symbiote, *Peter*. Peter seemed to realize that at the same moment Tony did, since he stumbled backwards. Tony

quickly turned his focus off of Beck's dead body and onto Peter.

"Kid," he said. "Look at me."

Peter stayed staring at Beck's body, his stumbling walk backwards causing him to trip and fall on the ground. He seemed to not even notice his fall, still focused on the man he had just killed.

"Peter," Tony said. "Peter!"

Only with his shout did Peter wrench his gaze away from the body and look at Tony. "Mr. Stark," he said, his voice breaking with the many emotions undoubtedly flooding through him right now. "Beck's dead. He's dead and it's--"

"Not on you," Tony interrupted. "You reacted in self-defense and no one can blame you for that. Do you hear me? You did what anyone would do in your shoes."

Peter shook his head. "He wasn't coming for me. He wasn't trying to kill me, wasn't trying to attack me when I pushed him. If he was, it would be self-defense. But he wasn't, which means that what I j-just d-did w-was m-m-mur--"

"Pete, it wasn't," Tony said, interrupting Peter's stuttering words. "He wasn't trying to kill you? Do you really believe that? Beck was reaching for a gun. A *gun*. The kind of weapon that has the potential to kill someone." Peter flinched, causing Tony to soften his next words. "He was going to kill you. You did what you had to do to survive."

Still, Peter shook his head. "I should've held my strength back. I should've--"

"Should've, could've, would've," Tony said, quoting Pepper's words from a few hours ago. "It's not your fault. None of this was."

Peter continued to shake his head as he held his head with his hand. "It is," he said, repeating the two words over and over again. "It is. It is it is."

"Peter," Tony said, trying to get the kid's attention back on him. "Peter." He pulled against the webbing on his arm, still unable to stand up.

"No!" Peter shouted.

Tony turned away from his trapped arm, looking at Peter in confusion and concern. "Kid?"

"No!" Peter yelled, his hands still around his head. "Go away!"

Thinking that the kid was talking to him, Tony said, "I sorta can't, kid. You trapped me here."

"No!" Suddenly, Tony noticed the suit changing colors, the black quickly starting to cover his body. And just like that, it all clicked. The puzzle piece that he couldn't find earlier, the significance of the suit changing color, all of it just clicked in Tony's mind. The black was the symbiote. Peter's suit turned black when the symbiote was controlling him. And, judging by the fact that the black was about to consume all of Peter's suit, the symbiote was trying to get control of Peter again.

Peter wasn't talking to Tony. He probably didn't even realize that Tony was there because he was so focused on getting the symbiote out of his head.

Suddenly, Peter's yells turned into screams of pain. He fell to the ground, his head hitting the



concrete below him, making Tony wince in sympathy. Peter curled himself into a ball, completely oblivious to the world around him, only focused on his battle against the symbiote. His screaming intensified, causing Tony's fear to spike.

"Peter!" Tony shouted, trying harder than ever to free his right arm. "Peter!"

The screams continued, causing Tony's fear to grow and grow, to a height he didn't even think was possible.

Deciding that there was no way to get his arm free, Tony tried to think of anything that he could do to help Peter's fight against the symbiote. His arm was stuck, the EMP had destroyed his suit, not to mention EDITH and his idea. Or maybe it hadn't.

An EMP shield could be made out of metal. An item had to be completely surrounded by it in order to survive the EMP. While the arc reactor and his suit didn't have such protection, the things in his pocket did, as it was completely encased by the nanotech suit when the EMP had gone off. With the suit's protection, it was possible that they had been spared from being destroyed by Beck's EMP.

Suddenly realizing this, Tony reached into his pocket, taking out a small remote.

At the crime scene at the bank, Tony had seen the symbiote react poorly to the sirens, meaning it was sensitive to high frequencies. So, he had hurried back to his lab, determined to build a sound machine that produced frequencies higher than a police siren. The end product produced a frequency that he couldn't even hear and, when he had tested it out, had broken the glass of water that had been sitting next to him at the time. Hopefully, it would be enough to get Venom away from Peter. But, the frequency could potentially affect Peter just as much as it would the symbiote, thanks to Peter's enhanced hearing. It was for that reason why he had hoped that he wouldn't have to use it and why he hesitated before pressing it.

One glance at Peter, though, with his suit black all the way up to his chest and the sounds of him screaming, made him press the button as hard as he could, desperately hoping that it hadn't been effected by the EMP.

The effect was instantaneous and Tony felt a small thrum of satisfaction at the thought that it hadn't been damaged. The symbiote receded from Peter's suit, the red and blue returning and the black disappearing. The symbiote's movements were much, much faster than earlier, quickly pulling away from Peter. Peter himself started screaming even more, proving that Tony's worries about the sound were correct. Tony's heart broke at the sound, knowing that he was the cause for it, but he knew that it was the only way to save Peter from the symbiote.

The sound appeared to stop after a few seconds, judging by the fact that the symbiote had stopped moving and that Peter's screams had stopped. Tony, who had looked away after seeing that the symbiote was doing what he wanted, looked back. His heart dropped to his stomach when he saw that the symbiote hadn't completely abandoned Peter; Peter's legs were still covered by the black, inky substance.

Peter noticed it as well, his eyes snapping open abruptly and uncurling from his tight ball in order to look at Tony. Tony inhaled sharply, seeing the pain and fear in them when their eyes met.

"Kid," he said. "I'm so, so sor--"

"Do it again," Peter murmured, his voice so soft that Tony had to strain to hear him.

“...what?” Tony asked, not believing what Peter was saying.

“The sound,” Peter gasped out. “Do it again.”

It was the last thing that Tony wanted to do. There had to be another way to get rid of the symbiote, a way that wouldn’t hurt the kid in the process. “Peter, I don--”

“Mr. Stark,” Peter interrupted. “*Please.*” The word was a plea, a last ditch effort to stop everything that was happening. It was filled with all of Peter’s pain, of all his fear, of all his guilt, and of all his hope. It was spoken with so much emotion that, even if he hadn’t been watching Peter’s face, Tony would’ve known that tears were pooling up in the kid’s eyes. Still, Tony hesitated.

That moment of hesitation, though, ended when the symbiote began to move again. It crept up through Peter’s legs, starting to inch its way up his chest. Peter’s eyes widened with terror, his eyes begging Tony to do something to help him. “Do it!” Peter yelled at him, his voice breaking with the sheer amount of desperation in it.

All thought of hesitating evaporated and Tony pressed the button for a second time. Like before, Peter screamed in pain and the symbiote quickly moved to get off of Peter and away from the noise it undoubtedly thought was terrible. But, unlike last time, Venom actually left, moving as far as it could away from Tony. Its path took it to the edge of the roof and it wasted no time racing down the side of the building. Tony watched it go, still stuck to the ground and unable to stop it, making a note to catch the symbiote before it could harm anyone else with its parasitic ways.

Forgetting the symbiote for the moment, Tony turned his attention back to Peter. The noise had stopped, leaving Peter on the ground, gasping for breath. Tony noticed that blood was slowly trickling out of his ears--evidence of the harm that his invention had caused the kid. He did this. He was the one who caused Peter this pain. He tried to stand up, momentarily forgetting about his trapped hand. “Peter?” Tony asked, unable to get up to check on him. “Are you okay?”

After a few seconds--long seconds that caused Tony’s worry to grow--Peter responded. “I’m fine,” he slurred heavily.

Tony scoffed, disbelieving him. The kid would always say he was fine--even if he was on death’s door. “I’m not so sure about that one, kid.”

“I’m fine, Mr. Stark,” Peter repeated, closing eyes. His next words were softer, making Tony think the kid was about to pass out. “I promise.”

“Peter?” Tony asked. When he didn’t get a response, Tony called his name, this time louder. “Peter? Kid, I need you to respond.”

But there was no response from Peter. He laid motionless on the ground, his eyes closed. With a sigh, Tony laid his head on the ground, realizing that Peter had passed out. He reached into his pocket, bringing out EDITH. Slipping the glasses on, he began to talk to the AI, giving her instructions. “EDITH, tell FRIDAY to bring me a suit.”

EDITH’s reply came a couple seconds later. “*FRIDAY has been contacted and has sent a suit.*”

Tony closed his eyes. “Good girl, EDITH. Can you call Pepper?”

“*Yes, Tony. Placing a call to Pepper Stark...call accepted.*”

Almost instantaneously, Tony was met with the sounds of Pepper’s worried voice, raining words upon him. “*Tony, oh my God, tell us what the hell is happening,*” Pepper said. “*You’re on speaker,*

*by the way, with May, Happy, and me.”*

“Hey, guys,” Tony said. “How much do you know already?”

“Nothing, boss,” Happy said. “*The drone’s camera went out as soon as you left.*”

Tony sighed, realizing that there was too much to tell them and not enough time to do so.

“Basically, there was a fight with Beck, he died, and now Peter’s injured and passed out. EDITH sent me a suit and, as soon as that gets here, I’m heading back to the Tower. Is Helen there yet?”

“Yes,” Pepper said. “*She arrived just a few minutes ago.*”

“Alright, I--” His words were interrupted as he heard the sound of repulsors. Seconds later, one of his suits landed on the ground. He breathed out a sigh of relief, feeling thankful that he would soon have some control over what was happening, once he freed himself from the ground. “I’m going to let you guys go,” Tony told the three people on the other end of the line. Before he could hang up, though, May was hurriedly speaking, seemingly trying to catch him before he left.

“Tony, is Peter hurt?” Her words sounded broken, as if she had been crying recently. Her tone asked for him to be honest, to give her the truth, but it also sounded as if she was scared to hear the answer, scared to know the state Peter was in. A part of Tony wanted to downplay what just happened, wanted to hide the injuries Peter sustained during the fight with Beck, the injuries Tony had caused him when he activated his sound machine, but he knew he couldn’t do that. No, this wasn’t like six years ago, when he wouldn’t tell May anything, when he didn’t want to worry her more than she already was. No, he owed her the truth.

“Yes,” Tony replied, glancing at the still figure of Peter lying on the ground, the slow rise and fall of his chest, the blood still slowly leaking out of his ears, the phantom sounds of Peter’s screams, remembering him slamming his head on the concrete as he fell when the symbiote tried to gain control of his body again. “He’s hurt. But he’ll heal, May. He’ll be okay.”

He heard May’s sigh of relief from the other end of the line and he could easily imagine her shoulders slumping in relief as she realized that the nightmare that had started that morning, when the school called her to tell her that her nephew had never showed up, would soon be over, that the mess that Beck and Venom had brought into their lives would soon be in the past, soon to be water under the bridge.

“I’m going to go now,” he said. “But I’ll be there soon.” He paused for a brief second, then amended his sentence, mentioning Peter this time. “*We’ll* be there soon, I promise.” With that, he told EDITH to hang up then turned his attention on the suit FRIDAY had brought him.

“Good evening, boss,” she said, speaking through the suit’s external comms. The helmet of the suit angled downwards as FRIDAY seemingly noticed that his right arm was stuck to the ground by Peter’s webs. “*You appear to be stuck.*”

Tony rolled his eyes, saying, “Thanks, FRI, I didn’t notice. Can you get me out of this stuff?”

“*I have Peter’s web dissolvment on hand. I can use that to free you.*”

“That would be perfect, FRI. Let’s use that.” FRIDAY moved the suit closer to the webbing, bringing out a spray to dissolve it. Watching her made Tony wonder why the suit would even have the web dissolvment solution. And that was when Tony noticed which suit it was.

It was the suit he had used before the nanotech suit and the one he had used the most when travelling around the city with Peter on their joint patrols. Peter had occasionally managed to get

himself stuck in his own webbing or web innocent people he suspected were criminals. As such, Tony had taken to carrying the web dissolvment with him on his suit. Apparently, he had never taken it out, which wasn't surprising since he had avoided being Iron Man in the past five years, since it reminded him too much of Peter. He probably hadn't even used this suit since before Titan.

At that moment, FRIDAY freed his arm. She opened the suit up, allowing Tony to stand up and step inside of it.

"Perfect," Tony said, sighing in relief, happy to finally be mobile again and in a suit. Then, he made his way over to Peter's unconscious body. "What injuries are we looking at, FRI?"

The AI waited a moment, most likely taking the time to scan Peter for his injuries. "*Peter has a possible mild concussion and both of his eardrums are damaged.*"

"But nothing Helen can't fix, right?" Tony asked, desperate to know if Peter would have any long-term ailments from the day's events.

"*Correct, boss. And, from what I can tell, the hallucinogen that Karen detected has made its way out of Peter's system.*"

"Thank God," Tony breathed out. A little bit louder, he asked, "It's safe to move him, right? There's nothing I have to be worried about?"

"*Peter is safe to move, boss. And I would recommend doing so, as he requires medical attention.*"

"Got it, FRI." Tony bent down, being careful as he picked Peter up. The kid didn't move at all nor did he say anything as Tony did so, well and truly knocked out. After the day the kid had, he wasn't surprised by it. "Plot a course for the Tower, FRIDAY. It's time to get Peter home."

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! I hope you enjoyed it and stay tuned for next week's chapter, which will be the final chapter to this story. Please leave a kudos and/or comment; they make my day!

# Chapter Nineteen

## Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday, everyone! I hope y'all are doing good. I rewrote the entire thing, so apologies if the writing style is completely different than the rest of the story--this story was written about seven months ago whereas this chapter was written just this past week. Anyways, I hope you enjoy it; it turned out longer than I was expecting!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### Part Five

*There's nothing wrong with just a taste of what you paid for*

*Wednesday, September 20, 2023*

Peter woke up slowly, awareness coming to him in waves. He kept his eyes closed as he took stock of his surroundings. The first thing he noticed was the soft sheets on him, the soft mattress below him. That meant that he was lying in a bed, but he didn't remember ever going to bed. No, the last thing he remembered was...nothing. He couldn't remember anything. He felt nervousness wash over him as he realized that he couldn't remember anything before waking up in this bed, his heart rate picking up as he became fearful. And that was the second thing that Peter noted: A steady beeping sound, perfectly in time with his beating heartbeat. He recognized it as a heart rate monitor, meaning that he had to be in the hospital. Taking the time to strain his ears, trying to figure out if anyone was in the room with him, he spotted his third thing: The sound of a single heartbeat, stuttering every few seconds. He placed it instantly as the sound of Mr. Stark's heart. And it was then that Peter remembered everything that happened, remembered what had led to him lying in a hospital bed.

May was dead. MJ was dead. He had shot four robbers at a bank, potentially killing all of them. He had set up the explosion at an abandoned school, with twenty-five criminals still inside of it. He had killed Beck, pushing the villain into a wall when he had reached for a gun.

Peter, who had never killed before, who had made sure to not do so, had killed numerous people. And it scared him to pieces upon realizing what he was capable of. He felt his breathing pick up, heard the beeping increase, but he didn't care. No, the only thing that mattered to him was what he had done. As visions of everything that happened in the past few weeks flooded through his mind, he squeezed his already closed eyes even tighter, willing them to go away. But they persisted, drowning him with their nightmarish qualities.

*"Mr. Stark?" Peter called, holding his stomach. The pain was increasing every second. "I don't feel so good."*

*Mr. Stark turned around, his face falling as he seemed to notice the pain that Peter was in. "Kid?"*

*At this point, it felt like Peter's entire body was coming apart and that his healing ability was trying (and failing spectacularly) to knit himself back together. He looked down at his hands, his panic growing as he noticed a piece of dust drifting away from it. Was he fading, too? Was he about to meet the same fate as the Guardians and Mr. Doctor Strange? "I-I don't know what's happening."*

*"You're going to be alright, kid," Mr. Stark said.*

*"I don't want to go," he said. "Please. I don't want to go. I don't want to go, please, sir." Peter felt his legs going out from underneath him. He couldn't feel them anymore. Did that mean that they had already turned into dust? Like the rest of him was about to do? His mantra stopped and he realized that there was no way to prevent this. Again, he regretted his stupid decision to follow Mr. Stark into that stupid spaceship. Peter realized that he never did apologize for that. Nor did he apologize for failing to remove the gauntlet from Thanos' hand. If he had done that, maybe this wouldn't be happening right now. Peter looked up at Mr. Stark's face, shocked to see the man's eyes filling with tears. He realized that he was the one causing Mr. Stark's pain. If he wasn't currently dying, there would be no reason for Mr. Stark to cry.*

*"I'm sorry," Peter said. After wishing that Mr. Stark and May would move on after he left, Peter closed his eyes, embracing the darkness that came with it.*

*"Kid?"*

*"And I am Iron Man," Mr. Stark said, carefully enunciating each word, as if each one were a struggle for him.*

*Peter felt his world collapse as he watched Mr. Stark fall to the ground. He thought he screamed the word "No!" but he wasn't entirely positive about that fact. He rushed to where he had seen Mr. Stark sit down*

*"Mr. Stark?" he asked timidly, like a scared little kid. "Hey." He rushed forward to crouch down beside his mentor. "Mr. Stark?" Peter asked again, bending down to see the man. "Are you okay, sir?"*

*Instantly, Mr. Stark's face became angry; so angry that Peter stumbled back. "Why do you care?" Mr. Stark asked, venom laced in his voice. "You're the one that caused this. You're the one who made me Snap."*

*"N-no, I didn't," Peter said, not understanding where Mr. Stark was getting his logic from. "You Snapped to save the universe; I didn't make you do anything."*

*Mr. Stark laughed, but it was one that was hollow. "Keep telling that to yourself, kid. But, at the end of the day, it was always your fault. Why do you think I did what I did?"*

*Peter blinked in confusion. "Did the Snap? I already said why; you did--"*

*"Not the Snap, Peter," Mr. Stark interrupted. "Why do you think I solved time travel?" His mentor only waited for a half a beat before answering his own rhetorical question. "I did it for you, kid. You died, Peter, and I felt like a part of myself had died alongside you. When Cap came to me with his time heist idea, I didn't want to do it at first. I didn't want to have hope that I could bring you back. But then I remembered you. I remembered everything you fought for; all of your ideals. And that's when I realized that I had to do it. I had to bring you back. I had the opportunity to do so, and, if I didn't....So, I solved time travel. I brought you back, kid.*

*"And now I'm sitting here, dying because I decided to save you. I decided to sacrifice myself for the sake that you could be saved. To create a world in which Peter Parker was alive. I'm dying because of you ." He jabbed a finger at Peter, enunciating the "you." Mr. Stark began to cough. Peter watched, frozen in fear, as he saw blood tainting Mr. Stark's lips.*

*"Mr. Stark," Peter said. "I-I didn't mean--"*

*"Who cares what you intended, Peter?" Mr. Stark snapped. He coughed again. "All that matters is that my death is on you ."*

*Mr. Stark started coughing again, causing Peter to face him again. Finally, he heard a sound and saw a sight that he would never forget. It was the sound of Mr. Stark's heart stopping, never to be heard again; and the sight of his arc reactor going out, never to be lit again.*

*"Kid!"*

*"Peter..." she said again, her unfocused eyes staring at him. She weakly held his arm with a shaking hand. "Peter, honey, I love you..." Her voice trailed into nothingness, her eyes glistened over, and her hand dropped.*

*"May!" he screamed again. Tears began welling up his eyes. "No," he whispered. "This can't be happening. Not again." He shook May lightly, but May refused to wake up. "May," he said brokenly. "May, please. Please, come back to me."*

*"Pe--"*

*Snap! Peter's enhanced senses heard her neck snap before he felt her go limp in his grasp. He gasped as she went limp, knowing that she was de--*

*No, Peter thought. He laid MJ down on the ground, crouching down next to her. "MJ, please, answer me." When she didn't, he shook her again, harder this time. There was no response.*

*"Answer me!" His voice broke with his command, sobs beginning to wrack over his body.*

*"Answer...me..." he repeated, his voice breaking with his emotions. He checked her pulse, praying for the best. His fingers couldn't feel a pulse. Using his enhanced senses, Peter listened for a heartbeat, breathing, anything, but there was nothing. MJ was dead.*

*"--ter, wake up!"*

*"I said, get off of me!" Peter yelled, bringing his hand up. It was closed in a fist and, as he stopped it inches away from Mr. Stark's face, he stared at it. He was breathing hard, each breath wrenching its way out of his lungs. He continued to stare at his trembling hand, trying to understand why he had almost punched his mentor in the face.*

*"It's okay! Yo--"*

*"Please, sir," the woman in front of him begged. The unmoving bodies of her three other robber friends were on the ground beside her, reminders of what Peter had just done. She cowered away from him and the gun in his hands, a hand up as if to prevent the bullet from flying out of it and towards her. Internally, Peter screamed at himself to throw away the gun, removing any possibilities of him doing something that he knew he would regret for years to come.*

*But the symbiote was still in control and Peter felt its joy at the violence around them creeping inside of him. He wanted to throw up as he felt the corners of his lips turn up into a smile, the symbiote seemingly pleased as the woman continued to beg for her life from the person who had sworn to never kill, the hero who had done all he could in the two years he had served as the city's protector to prevent other people doing what he had just done. In the distance, he could hear sirens wailing but still the symbiote still allowed the woman to continue to beg, seemingly delaying the time before it killed her, like the way a predator would play with its prey before delivering the final blow. The action was just as sickening as it was to feel himself smiling.*

*"Kid, hurry up. We gotta go."*

*Somehow, Beck's words hurried the symbiote into action, though Peter could feel its annoyance at being rushed. Peter screamed inside his head again as he felt himself pull the trigger, as he heard the woman's cry of pain as she was shot. Disgusted with the symbiote's rising joy about the shooting and by what he had just let himself do, Peter was glad when he was finally-- finally --able to toss the gun away from him, throwing it down on the ground beside the unmoving bodies.*

*"--u're safe, kid."*

*Peter was holding a grenade in his hand as he ran down the halls of the abandoned school. The symbiote had seen his half-baked idea inside of his head, using its control of his body to make him search for the tools necessary for it to work. He saw what appeared to be a science classroom and he dashed in, heading towards the supply room in the back of the room. He found himself hoping that nothing was inside of it, that the school had been successfully cleared out, but he knew his hopes were dashed when he felt a flash of happy anticipation from the symbiote, when he noticed the jars on the single filled shelf labeled with a flame--the universal symbol that its contents were flammable.*

*The symbiote made him grab one of the containers, despite his internal fighting with it, and then Peter found himself racing back in the direction that he had come from. Back again in the classroom filled with criminals, the symbiote forced him to swing around the room, dumping the flammable contents everywhere. Throwing away the now empty container, he grabbed Beck and, together, they swung out of the empty window. Peter felt himself toss the grenade inside of the classroom filled with people, the bomb immediately exploding upon impact.*

*And he felt as he twisted around, as he took in the destruction that he and his grenade had caused, an even wider smile than the one from the bank break out across his face. He felt as the symbiote became gleeful, its pride over the destruction and violence it had wrought letting itself be known.*

*"Peter, ple--"*

*"Kill Stark." Beck had a gun in his hand and was gesturing for Peter to take it. Peter fought against the command as much as he was able to, but the symbiote still had control. It made him take the gun and he couldn't help but feel the eagerness in the symbiote. Not only did it want to kill Mr. Stark, it was eager to.*

*"--ase list--"*

*His arm raised the gun up and aimed it at Mr. Stark's chest. Not even the symbiote could stop the shakiness of his arms. He squeezed his eyes shut as his finger brushed agai--*

*"I love you, Peter."*

*"--en to me!"*

*"I love you, too, Mr. Stark," Peter said. To his surprise, his words didn't shake and his arms had stopped shaking as well. He stared at his mentor--willing him to understand and accept his actions--as he brought the gun up to his head. It was only then that he closed his eyes, preparing for the end for the second time in, what felt like to him, less than a month.*

*"Peter!"*

*"Beck's dead. He's dead and it's--"*

*"Not on you," Mr. Stark said, interrupting Peter's words. "You reacted in self-defense and no one can blame you for that. Do you hear me? You did what anyone would do in your shoes."*



*But Peter was already shaking his head. How could Mr. Stark say that? How could he be so certain that Peter was in the right when Peter killed Beck? "He wasn't coming for me. He wasn't trying to kill me, wasn't trying to attack me when I pushed him. If he was, it would be self-defense. But he wasn't, which means that what I j-just d-did w-was m-m-mur--"*

And at that moment, Peter noticed his fourth item since waking up: Someone shaking him. His eyes flew open, wrenching himself out from his memories, scrambling up and backwards, getting away from whomever was shaking him. As his back hit the headboard of a bed, he suddenly remembered what he had first noticed: He was in a hospital bed. And as he made that remembrance, he noticed that the second thing he had noted--the heart rate monitor--had picked up in pace. He then realized that the third object on his list of observations--Mr. Stark's beating heart--had also picked up. He blinked, bringing himself out of his realizations and into reality in time to make sense of the person who had shaken him, making his fifth observation of the day.

"Mr. Stark?" he said, almost whispering.

His mentor nodded, stepping closer to Peter. "Kid, you need to calm down, okay? You're fine, you're safe, everyone's ok--"

"No," Peter breathed out, stopping Mr. Stark before he could finish that statement. No, everyone wasn't okay, not if May and MJ were gone. Not when he killed them. Suddenly, a thought crossed his mind, making his already fast heart rate increase. Mr. Stark didn't know what happened. He didn't realize that they were gone. Peter had to tell him, he had to tell his mentor what he had done. He had to tell him that he would end up killing him and his family, just like he had killed Uncle Ben, May, and MJ. The man would probably end up hating him, would probably take the suit away just like he had after the ferry disaster, would probably tell him to stay away from him and his family, but still Peter pushed forward, pushing himself to confess his crimes.

"May and MJ are dead," he said in a rush, the words pouring out of him quickly. He saw Mr. Stark blink, but he still continued. "I-I killed them, sir. I-I--"

"Peter," Mr. Stark interrupted, his unusually soft voice filled with confusion. "They're not dead. Hell, I saw May just an hour ago when she came by to check on you."

This time, Peter felt confusion creeping into his tone, blinking as he said, "You're wrong. I-I couldn't hear their heartbeat, Mr. Stark. I saw--" The tears that he was trying desperately to blink away were causing his throat to clench, choking off the words he was trying to say. "I saw them--"

"Peter, listen to me." Mr. Stark reached forward, grabbing Peter's hand in his as he stared intently into his eyes. "They are not dead. Whatever you think you saw, whatever Beck made you see, none of it is true, kid. Beck had access to illusionary tech and he had..." Mr. Stark's voice trailed off, his next words seemingly hard for him to say. "He had a hallucinogen. What you saw was just a product of one of those two things. Be--"

"What?" Peter interrupted. "It was fake?" Suddenly, he remembered something that Mr. Stark and Beck had said before the rooftop fight, before he had killed Beck.

*"I was there to help him with that indecision."*

*"With a hallucinogen?" Mr. Stark snapped. "Yeah, I noticed that part."*

*Beck looked confused as he spluttered out, "Ho-wh-never mind. Yes, with the hallucinogen. The symbiote helped with that, too. It helped to alter the hallucinations and show things that it knew would affect Peter the most."*

Beck had used a hallucinogen on him. Not only that, but it had tricked him into thinking that May and MJ were dead, making him believe that the only option for him was to allow the symbiote to take full control of his body. Then, remembering that Beck had also revealed that their first meeting was all a trick, all an illusion, Peter wondered what else was a lie about their friendship, what else was just an illusion of Beck's or a hallucination of Peter's.

"He lied to me," Peter whispered. Then, feeling like his quiet words couldn't be real, couldn't be trusted, he repeated them louder, loud enough for Mr. Stark to hear him and loud enough to make himself believe them. "He lied to me."

His mentor nodded slowly, sighing as he rubbed a hand over his face. "Yeah, kid, he did."

Tears welled up in Peter's eyes. "You were right about him. I shouldn't have listened to him, I should've stayed away from him. I'm sorry, Mr. Stark. I'm so, so--"

But Mr. Stark was already shaking his head. "You have nothing to apologize for, kid. You becoming friends with him has everything to do with me. Or, to be more accurate, it has to do with what I failed to do. I wasn't there for you the way I should've been after the Blip and I want to fix that, kid. I meant what I said earlier tonight." He glanced at the clock on the wall and Peter followed his gaze to see that the clock was reading two in the morning. "Or more like last night," his mentor corrected himself, chuckling slightly before continuing. "I love you, kid, more than I can ever explain. And, because of that, I want to be here for you. I want to be the person you turn to when you're hurting, not some hero you met while out on the streets of Queens being Spider-Man. So, c'mon kid, let me in."

Peter blinked, processing Mr. Stark's words. Almost hesitantly, he said, "I-I meant what I said earlier, too, Mr. Stark. I love you. I can't imagine not having you in my life. A-and I want to talk to you, I want to describe just how insane my life has gotten ever since Ti..." The name of the place where he had died five years ago got stuck on his tongue, the name failing to be uttered by him. Hoping his mentor didn't notice the failure, he fixed his wording. "Um, space, but I don't know how. I-I feel like I can't."

Mr. Stark blinked and Peter noticed that moisture was creeping into his eyes. Five years ago, he would've sworn that his mentor was incapable of crying in front of anyone, including himself. Now, though, in the years that had passed without a living Peter within them, it didn't seem that unusual. Now, it seemed to be just as natural as hearing Mr. Stark's soft voice speaking with him, filled with concern and love. It was different from the man his mentor was five years ago and Peter found himself liking it, not feeling like it was a reason to run away, not a difference highlighting how much Peter didn't belong. No, it was a difference Peter found himself leaning into, bringing him closer to the man he loved and the man he knew loved him back.

"That's okay, kid," Mr. Stark said. "Just take your time." Peter nodded, then thought of a question he wanted to ask. He pushed it down, though, feeling like he didn't want to know the answer to it. Mr. Stark seemingly saw the unspoken question for he narrowed his eyes at him. "What's up, kid?"

Peter looked down, fiddling with the edges of the blanket on top of him. "I-if May and MJ were just a hallucination, could the same be true of the other people that..." Peter let his question fade out, trusting his mentor to be able to fill in his unspoken words.

*"Could the same be true of the other people that had died?"*

Judging from Mr. Stark's pained expression, he did fill them in. He looked away from Peter, but Peter didn't miss the pain in them nor did he miss the apprehension in them. Something bad had

happened and his mentor didn't want to tell him about it. That had to mean that Peter's hopes were false and he quickly discovered just how true it was that losing hope was worse than not having hope.

"No," he breathed out. "No, Mr. Stark, please." His mentor shook his head and Peter felt his emotions spiraling out of control. "Please, don't tell me that they actually did die."

Mr. Stark nodded slowly, his voice quiet as he said, "They're gone, kid."

Peter blinked back the tears quickly filling in his eyes, unable to push away the guilt quickly filling inside of him. He stared down his hands, unable to look his mentor in the eye. "I killed them," he breathed out. "I killed Beck. I killed those people at the school. I killed that lady at the bank. I--"

"Peter, it wasn't your fault. None--"

"But it was!" Peter shouted, his head shooting up to look at Tony. "Everything was my--"

"Peter, listen to--"

"Shut up!" Peter yelled. "Listen to what I'm saying! I'm the one who killed them!"

"It was the symbiote!"

"Who was the one who accepted the symbiote, Mr. Stark? Me. I did. And because of that, everything that happened today was my fault. I killed those people. Just like I killed my uncle. Just like my death in space was my fault. Just like I almost killed you during the battle against Thanos. Everything is, and always will be, my fault. Everything bad that happens is my fault. And I will end up killing every person that I love. You will all die one day, and it'll all be my fault."

Silence met the end of his words, a silence that seemed to stretch for a long time. Peter found himself breathing heavily as he stared at Mr. Stark, who seemed unable to say anything. Finally, Mr. Stark spoke, his words soft and said slowly, as if he was searching for the correct words to say.

"Kid, it's not your fault. Even if you were the one to accept the symbiote, Beck is still the one to blame. He manipulated you, forced you to accept it. Anyone that died yesterday was his fault alone. He's the one responsible for all the violence. And you're not to blame for his death, either. Like I said earlier, you reacted in self-defense and no one can say otherwise. As for you being responsible for your uncle's death and for Titan...kid, I don't know how you arrived at those conclusions. I don't know how your uncle died, but I know that you loved him and that you cared for him. Because of that, I find it hard to believe that you could have ever been responsible for his death. And Titan, Pete, that was all Thanos. You had nothing--absolutely nothing--to do with that. And you sure as hell weren't responsible for my almost death. No, that was my decision and my decision alone; you couldn't have done anything to prevent it or sway my decision. Peter, you aren't at fault here and you're not the one responsible for every bad thing in the world. Some things are outside of our control and sometimes bad things simply just happen. And you aren't going to kill us, kid, so get rid of those thoughts."

Just like Peter's words from earlier, silence greeted the end of Mr. Stark's words. He blinked, staring at his mentor as his words flooded through him. They drowned out his fears, drowned out his guilt, washing away his negative emotions. He felt the tension inside of him dissipate, something inside of him releasing as he realized that Mr. Stark was right, as he realized that this wasn't his fault. It was as if hearing someone he trusted say those words were enough for him to believe in them, were enough for him to know that they were true. And he found himself slowly nodding as a feeling of calm washed over him.

“You believe me, kid?” his mentor asked, looking earnestly at Peter’s face.

“Yeah,” Peter answered, his voice barely above a whisper. “Yeah, I do.” Suddenly, he felt tears streaming down his face, the past three weeks catching up to him. Instead of pushing away the feelings like he had been doing, he let them out, letting them consume him. As he cried, he felt Mr. Stark sit down on the bed next to him, pulling him into a hug. Peter returned the hug, wrapping his arms around his mentor as his tears continued to fall.

After what felt like hours, Peter finally calmed down enough to pull away from Mr. Stark, wiping at his eyes. “Sorry,” he said sheepishly.

Mr. Stark shook his head. “Nu-uh. You’re not allowed to apologize.” Peter laughed, something he realized that he hadn’t done in what felt like forever. His laugh quickly turned into a yawn, making him aware of the tiredness pulling at his bones. Noticing his yawn, Mr. Stark said, “Get some sleep, kid.” He made a motion to stand up, but stopped when Peter grabbed his hand.

“Do you mind staying?” he asked, wincing at the desperation in his voice. His mentor’s face softened and he nodded, shifting his position so that he was lying beside Peter. Peter laid down as well, shifting downwards from his position of sitting up. He felt Mr. Stark’s prosthetic arm wrap around him, pulling him closer to his mentor. With his head on Mr. Stark’s chest, he could hear his heartbeat perfectly. Instead of annoying him, it lulled him to sleep and his eyes quickly fell close as he let himself fall into unconsciousness.

...

Peter woke up when the weight beside him on the bed moved, the movements slow and careful, as if the mover was trying their best to not be noticed. Still, Peter did notice them, realizing that Mr. Stark was getting out of the bed to leave. The weight of his mentor's body fully left the bed and Peter heard him make his way to the side of the room. He then heard the sound of curtains rustling, light from the sun outside dancing across his closed eyes. He was about to open his eyes and complain about the sudden arrival of the sunlight when he heard a new sound: The sound of heels walking down the hallway. Soon after that, the door to his room opened, adding more light to the once dark room.

“Pepper,” Mr. Stark greeted, confirming the identity of the newcomer that Peter had guessed at when he heard the sound of her heels upon the tiled floors of whatever building Peter was in. He stayed standing up to talk with her if the weight that was absent on Peter's bed was anything to go by.

“Tony,” the woman in question replied. Her tone was light and slightly amused, but Peter could hear a faint undertone of concern and tiredness in it, hinting that something was wrong. He heard the door shut, hiding the light from the hallway and heard her sit down on the chair beside his bed, but he kept his eyes closed, feeling a need to keep his conscious self a secret. “I got a hold of the police captain. He said that we provided him with more than enough evidence to prove Peter’s innocence and that he’ll call off the investigation on him.”

“Good.” Mr. Stark let out a breath, sighing in relief at Mrs. Stark’s words. “And what about the public? They saw the footage of what the symbiote did. Hell, the news even called him a villain. What ca--”

“I’ve already dealt with it, honey. The police released a statement stating that an alien was behind the killings, a statement which I backed up.”

“And people just believed that?”

“We live in a world filled with superheroes, gods, wizards, and aliens that can kill half of the world’s population with a snap of their fingers, Tony. It’s not too far-fetched to say that an alien can possess someone and force them into being a killer.”

“I suppose you’re right.”

“You suppose I’m right? Honey, you know that I’m always right.”

Peter’s attempts at feigning sleep blew apart at Mrs. Stark’s latest sentence, his loud snort of laughter revealing that he had been listening to her and Mr. Stark’s whispered conversation for the last minute or so.

“Kid, you’re awake?” his mentor asked. Peter opened his eyes, looking over at the man to see a small, confused frown on his face.

“He’s been awake since before I walked in, honey,” Mrs. Stark said. Peter gaped at the woman in surprise, thinking that he had been faking being asleep quite well. Apparently not if she had been quick to spot him. She simply smiled at him, hiding how she had known. “Good morning, sweetheart. It’s great to see that you’re okay.”

Peter nodded. “Hey, Mrs. Stark.”

“It’s Pepper,” she corrected, still smiling. Peter realized with a jolt that it had been a correction she had made back in Wakanda three weeks ago, on the day that Peter had woken up on Titan, on the day that he discovered that he had been dead for five years, on the day that he had found out that Mr. Stark had gotten married to the then Miss. Potts and had a five-year-old daughter, on the day that he had seen a ring on May’s finger, signifying her marriage with Happy. It was a correction he failed to make for reasons he hadn’t known why at the time. Now, though, he had a pretty good guess as to what those reasons were.

Dropping the formality when speaking with the woman would have just been one of the many changes he was experiencing since coming back to life. It would once again highlight how his life had flipped upside down. And, at that time, he couldn’t quite wrap his head around the fact that Miss. Potts had married his mentor, thus becoming Mrs. Stark. True, he had known that they were engaged--they had done so immediately following Peter’s denial of becoming an Avenger--but, when picturing their big day, Peter had always imagined himself there, present to watch them exchange their vows. Never had he imagined that they would do so without him there. To use Pepper instead of Mrs. Stark it would’ve been just too hard and he wasn’t prepared to do so then, not when he wasn’t even ready to call her Mrs. Stark and not Miss. Potts, not when he was desperate to hold onto the things that hadn’t changed.

Now, in hindsight, he realized that holding on tight to the things that hadn’t changed in the five years that he had been dead for wasn’t fair, to him or the people he loved. It had led to his downfall, led to him cutting ties with the people that he had thought changed too much for him to have a relationship with, led to him becoming ensnared in Beck’s words about his family not wanting him to be around and not loving him anymore, trusting and believing in them instead of the fact that, regardless of the amount of time that had passed, Mr. Stark, May, Mrs. Stark, and Happy were all still there for him, still loved him.

Yes, everything changed, everything had flipped upside down, but the relationships from five years ago still stood and he was welcome into them. And, upon realizing this, Peter also realized that maybe calling the woman in front of her--with her strawberry blonde hair and eyes filled with kindness--by her first name wouldn’t be too bad.

“Good morning, Pepper,” Peter said. She smiled widely while her husband gaped at him, seemingly shocked at the ease with which Peter had dropped the formal name for the woman.

“Oh, so you can call her by her first name, but I’m still stuck with ‘Mr. Stark’?”

Peter simply smiled at him, nodding as he did so. He remembered then that he had called his mentor “Tony” when he had seen him almost die, yet now didn’t feel the time to change to that again. No, that time might come later, but--for now--he would stay with “Mr. Stark” if only to annoy the man in any way possible. Turning his attention away from his mentor’s affronted face, Peter looked back at Pepper, remembering her conversation with Mr. Stark just minutes ago.

“So everyone knows that I didn’t do anything?” he asked. “That it was all the symbiote’s fault?”

Immediately, Pepper’s face became serious, switching away from their domestic talking to a more serious conversation quickly. “Yes, sweetheart. Everything’s been taken care of; you don’t have to do a single thing. I told them that Venom--the alien--had been discovered by Beck and that he had used it to make Spider-Man seem like a villain. Everyone knows who Beck really was and that you’re innocent.”

He nodded, feeling like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders, a weight he hadn’t even known existed. “Thanks, Pepper,” he said, truly being sincere when he said that. Then, he turned back to face Mr. Stark. “Where’s May?”

“She’s probably still sleeping,” his mentor answered. “I kicked her out of here when she came by at midnight, insisting that she get some rest.”

“Can I see her?” While he knew that what he saw in the nightmare world that Beck’s hallucinogen had put him in didn’t actually happen, while he knew that both she and MJ were still alive, a part of him still felt that there was a chance that they were actually dead. And it was that part of him that pushed him to see May, to make sure with his own eyes that she was alive.

Mr. Stark looked at him, searching his face. He nodded after doing so, maybe seeing the desperation in his face or maybe understanding the part that didn’t believe what his mentor had said a few hours ago, early in the morning and at a time that no sane person should be up at. “Of course, kid. FRI?” Mr. Stark glanced up at the ceiling.

“Yes, boss?”

“Be a dear and tell May that Peter’s up and would like to see her.”

A few seconds later came the AI’s response. “*May has been informed. Happy is also wondering if he and Morgan can come down with her.*”

Mr. Stark looked over at Peter, lifting his eyebrows up in a silent question. “Kid?”

He debated with himself for all of half a second, realizing that he wouldn’t mind that as much as he would’ve thought just a few days ago. “Yeah. All three of them can come in.”

Again, Mr. Stark searched his face, seemingly trying to find out if he was being honest. Peter kept his face clear, letting his honesty be easily seen in his expression. After a moment or two, the man nodded swiftly. “You heard him, FRIDAY. Send ‘em down.”

Just five minutes later, he heard the sound of running footsteps, coupled with the sounds of a child giggling and shouting gleefully. Peter could also hear the sounds of a different voice shouting, a little less happy than the child and a good deal more cross, but it still made Peter smile just as

much as the happy sound of the child's voice did. And, a minute after that, the door flew open, the hallway light pouring into the room once more, admitting the small figure of Morgan Stark.

"Petey!" she all but yelled, pouncing onto the bed. Just like three weeks ago when Mr. Stark had been in the hospital, she clamored her way onto Peter's lap, heedless of the fact that it might hurt Peter. And, unlike three weeks ago, Peter wasn't shocked at her sudden appearance, laughing while she sat on his lap, drawing her into a hug. "Uncle Happy said that you got hurt but that you would get all better." Her voice was muffled from where it was pressed into his shirt and he let her go, giving her room to properly speak.

"Well, I'm happy to confess that Uncle Happy was right," Peter said.

"I think we're all happy to hear that one, Peter," a voice said. Peter looked up, his eyes falling onto his aunt, who was stepping into the room. He inhaled sharply, drinking in the presence of his very much alive aunt walking towards him, the glasses she rarely wore perched on her nose, almost hiding the tears building in her eyes. He closed his eyes, letting the sounds of her heartbeat flood over him, the sounds of it drowning out the little voice that said that the scene in front of him might be another hallucination or one of Beck's illusions, that he wasn't actually sitting in the med bay, surrounded by his family.

"May," he breathed out, letting his eyes open to look at her once more.

"Oh, honey," she said, the tears Peter noticed earlier falling down her face as she came up to the bed, her hand reaching out to cup his face. And maybe it was her own broken voice or the touch of her hand that brought tears streaming down his own face, despite his attempts to hold them back. May surged forward, her hand dropping away from his face and around him, pulling him into a hug.

He let her, wrapping his own arms around his aunt. Their hug left no room for Morgan on his lap and she shifted away, squeaking out a protest to being evicted from her seat. Once she was free from their embrace, she wrapped her own arms around Peter, shouting out, "Group hug!"

Peter laughed through his tears, removing an arm from around May to hold her against him. He laughed even harder when Morgan pulled away slightly, noticing that no one else in the room was joining, prompting her to encourage--or, to be more fair, order--them to join in on the hug. Pepper was the first to follow the five-year-old's command, standing from her chair and collapsing down on the bed with them. Her actions made Mr. Stark the next to join in on the hug, the metal of his prosthetic arm cool against Peter's skin as he rested his right hand on Peter's forearm. Last but not least to join in was Happy, who was standing awkwardly in the doorway, seemingly unsure of what he was supposed to be doing. It wasn't until Peter made eye contact with him, gesturing with an incline of his head, that the man stepped fully into the room, piling into the group hug.

And, at that point, Peter felt all of his worries from the past three weeks drain away. He felt his tears begin to abate when the feeling of love swiftly washed over him, chasing away any and all of his negative thoughts and feelings. It was then that Peter realized just how much his family cared for him, just how much these five people loved him, and just how much Beck was wrong. And he let his eyes close, drinking in the sounds of five heartbeats, basking in the people hugging him, letting himself be swept away by their love and concern for him.

Beck and the symbiote were gone, along with their poisonous words and visions. The Blip might have messed with everything and everyone in the world, people and relationships shifting exponentially until they weren't even like what they were five years ago. It had left him drowning in a sea of confusion, unsure of which way was up or how to swim through life's chaoticness, but it didn't take away his family like he had initially thought. No, these people were still here, still

drawing him close in a hug, still pouring their love upon him. And, with their help, he knew that he would figure out how to navigate life after the Blip.

And it was upon that revelation that let Peter relax, feeling like he was calm for the first time since swinging away from the school bus heading for MoMA. His eyes were still closed and he melted into the holds of the people he considered his family. He found himself understanding his place in both families, the family that May had built with Happy and the family that Mr. Stark had built with Pepper and Morgan. And he made his final realization of the night.

The bridge that spanned between the families and the bridge that had been built while Peter was dead wasn't born out of a shared experience of grieving and mourning him. No, it was born out of a shared experience of loving and caring for him. And his death didn't destroy that bridge, didn't ruin their connections. No, it only strengthened their resolve to work together to keep him safe and to rain their love upon him.

And, upon that realization, Peter felt like everything was truly back to the way things were five years ago. True, the world had shifted dramatically around them, but they still had each other and they still loved and cared for one another.

It was that final thought that left him feeling indescribably happy and he couldn't help the smile pulling at the corners of his lips. He let it, thus letting a wide smile break out upon his face. And, with his family holding tight onto him, he felt like nothing could go wrong.

No, everything was perfect in the world.

## Chapter End Notes

And that's that! I hope you enjoyed the chapter. I have also decided to add in an epilogue, so tune in next week for that, the actual final chapter!



# Epilogue

## Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday! I hope everyone enjoys the final chapter to this story!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### Part Five

*There's nothing wrong with just a taste of what you paid for*

*Tuesday, October 31, 2023*

In the weeks following the final battle with Beck, Peter found himself the happiest he had ever been since returning from the dead. In the first week, Mr. Stark had insisted he stayed at the Tower, stating that it was just to ensure that Peter was completely fine. Despite his many assurances to the man that his healing abilities had fixed everything within hours of the injuries happening, Mr. Stark didn't believe him and was slow to believe even Dr. Cho's report that Peter was physically fine. It wasn't until May and Pepper pointed out that Peter needed to live his life that he was allowed to leave the Tower and return to the apartment he shared with May and Happy.

Unlike before where the apartment didn't feel like home and more like a cheap knockoff of his and May's apartment from before the Blip, it suddenly became much more homey. Peter started leaving sweatshirts everywhere, much to Happy's displeasure, and his bedroom became the cluttered catastrophe it normally was, with textbooks, homework assignments, various Spider-Man tech, and clothes everywhere. May started taking less shifts at work, giving her the ability to have dinner each night with Peter and Happy. It turned out that Happy was a fantastic cook, something that Peter had never noticed since coming back. With his home-cooked meals and his stories from his job as Mr. Stark's head of security, Peter found himself more connected to the man now more than ever.

That feeling of being more connected applied to the Starks as well. Each morning, Mr. Stark made a point to send a text to Peter, simply checking in and asking what plans he had that day. Sometimes, while at school, Peter would feel his phone vibrate and he would pull it out, discovering that Morgan had stolen her dad's phone to send pictures of herself. It was clear that a five-year-old was taking them as they featured close shots of her various parts of her face. Hiding a chuckle, Peter would send pictures back, pictures just as terrible as the ones she would send him. They would continue to do so until either Mr. Stark would get control over his phone again or until a teacher caught Peter, earning him a detention. Still, it was worth it, especially when MJ would join him in the detention, continuing her sophomore year pastime of drawing people in crisis.

And, as the weeks eventually turned into over a month since Beck's passing and the weather began turning, becoming colder and colder with each passing day, Peter found himself looking forward to each weekend trip up to the lake house, looking forward to spending time with Morgan, Pepper, and Mr. Stark. And he found himself letting go of the things he had missed in the past five years, instead looking forward to the time he did actually have with his family. And that was why he found himself bounding up the steps of the lake house, excited to fulfill Mr. Stark's request of taking Morgan trick-or-treating that night.

"I'm here!" he called out when he let himself into the house, using the house key his mentor had

given him just a few days after the incident with Beck. Almost immediately, he heard running footsteps coming from upstairs, becoming louder when its owner started to stomp down the stairs.

“Petey!” Morgan shouted, jumping the last two steps in her haste to get to Peter. “You’re here! You’re here!” She continued her running sprint, ramming her little body into Peter’s, wrapping her little arms around his legs.

He didn’t even stumble when she did so, bending down to give her a hug, letting the little girl give him a proper hug. “Hey, Mo! You ready for trick-and-treating?”

“Mhm!” she hummed in response. “Look at my costume!” She pulled out of their hug, giving a whirl to allow a proper showing of the light blue dress she was wearing. “I’m going as Elsa!”

Peter nodded, remembering the character as one from Frozen, a Disney movie he had watched with Ned and MJ a few years previously. He had also watched the sequel with Morgan the last time he was up at the lake house, a movie that had come out during the Blip, thus something he had missed out on. Morgan had been blown away by the idea of him never even hearing that the movie existed, insisting that they had to watch what she called her favorite movie. That title wasn’t much praise from her, considering that every Disney movie ever made was her favorite. Still, Peter didn’t say anything, only agreeing to watch it with her. To his surprise, he found himself liking the movie and the songs that came with it.

“Wow, Morgan!” he complimented, pulling himself out his thoughts just in time to comment on her Halloween costume. “You look great!”

She smiled widely, her happiness evident in her expression. Then, her face fell as she seemingly noticed something. “Where’s your costume, Petey?”

He shook his head while answering her question. “I don’t have one. I’m too old for Halloween now.”

The little girl appeared to be dumbfounded by that sentence, her eyes going wide in shock. “But you can never be too old for Halloween. I’m going to go find you a costume!” She turned away and he called after her, trying to tell her that it was fine.

“Mo, really, I don’t need a costume!” But she bounded away from him, running up the steps while yelling for her mom, informing Pepper of Peter’s dilemma of not having a costume. Upon realizing that there was nothing he could do to stop the girl’s insistence that he needed a Halloween costume, Peter sighed, shaking his head in exasperation of Morgan’s stubbornness. He heard a small chuckle from behind him and he turned around, not even remotely worried about the unknown voice as his spidey-sense hadn’t gone off to warn him of the person behind him.

Peter found Mr. Stark standing in the hallway behind him, leaning against the wall with his arms folded across his chest. He had a smile on his face, a red cape tied around him, and a tall, black top hat upon his head. “She got you, too, huh?” Peter asked, commenting on his mentor’s outfit choice.

The man nodded, pushing away from the wall and moving closer to Peter. “Unfortunately so, kid. I tried to convince her that I should just go as Iron Man, but she said that wouldn’t do, seeing as I am Iron Man.” Peter blinked at his word choice, instantly reminded of the last time he had heard those words said, remembering a battle ending with Mr. Stark collapsing, his arc reactor going out, leading to a hospital visit in Wakanda, with Peter certain that his mentor had just died in front of him. Mr. Stark winced, seeming to pick up on his own triggering words. “Sorry, kid, wrong choice of words.”

Peter shook his head, shaking himself out of the thoughts of what happened two months ago, instead focusing on the here and now. It was something he had been trying to get better with, letting go of the past and its traumatic memories, focusing instead on the present and the future. “It’s fine.” Then, remembering what Mr. Stark had been saying, he asked, “Do you think she’ll let me go as Spider-Man?”

Mr. Stark considered the question for a moment or two before answering. “It’s worth a shot. She’s never seen the suit and she’s always wanting to see your abilities.”

Peter snorted, remembering Morgan’s fascination with what he could and couldn’t do. Her questions and insistence on seeing him in action reminded him of how Ned was the day after discovering that he was Spider-Man, asking him questions upon questions. Whereas Ned’s questions had bothered him to no end, answering Morgan’s questions and seeing her awe about his abilities was something he enjoyed.

“On second thought, maybe I shouldn’t,” Peter said. “My identity would be revealed within seconds if I went out with her. She’ll be telling everyone about who’s really behind the mask.”

Mr. Stark laughed. “Oh, I wouldn’t be too certain of that. Bribe her with juice pops and she’ll keep anything a secret.”

“Will do, Mr. Stark. I’ll get her hopped up on juice pops and Halloween candy before returning to Queens, leaving you with a hyper five-year-old.”

“Exac--wait,” Mr. Stark cut himself off before he could get too far into his sentence, narrowing his eyes at Peter, seemingly realizing what Peter just detailed out. “No, no, that’s not happening. You know what, maybe you shouldn’t be responsible for walking her around, not if you’re planning that.”

Peter scoffed, rolling his eyes. “Oh, come on, Mr. Stark. Isn’t this what older brothers do? Take their little sisters out on Halloween night, helping them sneak candy past their parents, making them hyper?”

Mr. Stark blinked, no doubt picking up on Peter’s use of the word “brother.” It was what Mr. Stark had called him back in Wakanda when Peter had first met Morgan, but hadn’t ever used it since. Peter himself hadn’t used the term. Using it at that moment felt right, just like it had felt right for him to agree to taking Morgan out trick-or-treating.

“Yeah, kid,” his mentor said softly. “It is what brothers are supposed to do, so I guess I can’t really complain, can I?”

Peter shook his head. “Nope,” he said, popping the p. He then walked past Mr. Stark, heading for the kitchen. “What do you have planned for Halloween dinner?”

Mr. Stark followed him in, pulling out a container from the fridge. “It’s Taco Tuesday here in the Stark household tonight. Pep already cooked the meat, like the am--”

“Amazing woman she is,” Peter finished. Mr. Stark’s head shot up, a small frown of frustration on his face. “Come on, Mr. Stark. You always say that so I happen to have that sentence memorized by now. Besides, it’s not too difficult to fill in the blanks. Everyone knows that Pepper Stark is amazing, so shouldn’t you say--her husband--the same?”

Mr. Stark shook his head, deciding to let that train of thought go as he prepared dinner. Peter helped him by pulling out the toppings from the fridge, noticing that someone--most likely Pepper--

-had already sliced the lettuce and tomatoes, leaving his task to be simpler than Mr. Stark's task of reheating the meat.

"So, where's May and Happy?" Mr. Stark asked.

"Back in Queens," Peter answered, taking the lids off of the tomato and lettuce containers. "They decided to have a Halloween date night and go see the new scary movie that came out tonight."

"Happy agreed to go watch a horror movie?" Mr. Stark asked, sounding shocked by that sudden turn of events.

"Yeah, I was surprised, too. I tried to get him to watch one with me last week and he bolted from the room as soon as I put the DVD in."

"Ok, I'm going to not comment on the fact that you still use DVDs and--"

"You kinda just did by saying that you aren't going to do so," Peter pointed out, turning to look at his mentor. Mr. Stark stuck his tongue out in response to Peter, causing Peter to scoff. "Yeah, real mature, Mr. Stark, real mature."

Mr. Stark only shook his head. "Anyways, back to what I was saying before I was rudely interrupted"--he gave Peter a look that seemingly was supposed to make him feel guilty, but Peter only looked at his mentor innocently, causing the man to huff in response and look back away from him--"if they're staying home, how did you get here?"

Peter grinned widely, grabbing his wallet from his back pocket and pulling out a card from it. "You're looking at a fully licensed driver now, Mr. Stark," he said triumphantly, holding out his driver's license with a flourish.

"No," Mr. Stark said, looking away from the pan of meat he was heating up, moving closer to get a better look at what was in Peter's hand. He took it, inspecting it closely, almost as if he was trying to figure out if it was real or not. "No. Who in their right mind would give Peter Parker a driver's license?"

"Ouch, I'm hurt," Peter said, miming his hurt by placing a hand over his heart. He snatched the license back from his mentor, putting it away in his wallet, which he stuffed back in his pocket. "Truly, really. I don't think I can ever heal from your lack of belief in my driving abilities. I mean, seriously, what would ever give you the impression that I'm a bad driver?"

"Hmm, let me think, kid." Mr. Stark placed a finger on his chin, pretending to think. "How about the fact that you crashed that kid's car on Homecoming night?"

"That's not allowed to count," Peter said. "That happened in 2016, seven years ago."

"That's if you consider the Blip. For you, how many months ago was it?"

Peter looked away, doing the math quickly in his head. "It still doesn't count, as it--"

"Pete, if you give me any answer below twenty-four months, it counts."

Peter huffed, turning away to grab the tortilla shells from the bread box. "Fine, okay, you got me. But that's just one time and that's before the many, many driving lessons Happy gave me this past month. So your point of me being a bad driver is null and void."

"Alright, fine, but I'm still not stepping in another car with you in the driver's seat, not after what

happened last time.”

Peter laughed while taking out some of the shells and wrapping them in aluminum foil. Remembering the one--and only--driving lesson Mr. Stark had given him, he couldn't blame the man for not wanting to do so again. “Fair enough, Mr. Stark, fair enough.”

They continued talking about everything and nothing for the next few minutes while the shells heated up in the oven and Mr. Stark finished reheating the taco meat. Their conversation lasted them through setting up the taco buffet, only finishing when Pepper and Morgan came downstairs, the latter of whom wanted to hurry through dinner, wanting to go trick-or-treating as soon as possible. When Peter told her about Mr. Stark's idea of him going as Spider-Man, Morgan had been all for it. Still, Peter expressed the need for her to not tell anyone that Peter Parker was actually Spider-Man and, just like his mentor had said, he bribed her with all the juice pops she could ever possibly want to keep it a secret. Morgan considered his bribe for a second or two, looking exactly like her mother while doing so, before agreeing. After that, Peter started eating, doing so almost as fast as Morgan was.

“Come on, kid,” Mr. Stark said when Peter was done eating. His mentor stood up, gesturing for him to follow him. “I want to show you something.” Curious, Peter followed him outside to the shed that Peter remembered housed Mr. Stark's lab. He felt excitement fill inside of him only to quickly abate when he remembered what he had discovered in it the first--and last--time he had walked into the shed. He had found out that his mentor was planning on taking something that he had designed himself, repurposing it, and selling it without Peter's permission.

His excitement and curiosity all but flew away, replaced by the new feeling of apprehension when Mr. Stark headed to the drawer marked *Current Projects*. That was where Mr. Stark's idea for Peter's webs had resided within. Was his mentor actually planning on telling him about it after all? Or was he grabbing a different project, still planning on keeping the new web idea a secret from Peter?

Oblivious to the emotions and thoughts running rampant through Peter, Mr. Stark opened up the drawer, taking out a very familiar notebook, one that Peter had scrawled notes upon notes in it, back when he was a sophomore, barely a year into being Spider-Man and still new to the whole idea of Mr. Stark--*the* Tony Stark--being his mentor. It was a time where being a hero was all he wanted from life, throwing away any ideas of going to college, instead enraptured with the idea of Spider-Man consuming every bit of his life. Now, after experiencing the truth of the job, after dying on Titan, after watching Mr. Stark almost die, after the illusions that Beck had planted in his head with his drones and a hallucinogen, that desire had somewhat depleted, yet it was still there, still apparent in the daily patrols he partook in every day after school. It was another difference between his life before and after the Blip, the nostalgic feeling inside of him a stark contrast to the excitement he had felt when he looked at the notebook sitting inside his nightstand right before leaving for school in 2018, right before attending a field trip to MoMA that had ended with him swinging away from the bus, ended with him going to space and dying.

“Kid?” a voice asked. Peter blinked, drawing himself out of his memories, and he looked up to see Mr. Stark looking at him in concern. “You good?”

Peter nodded a little, trying to give his mentor a smile to ease his worry. Judging by the man's expression, it didn't work, leading to him having to speak. “Yeah, I'm fine. It's just...it brings back memories, y'know?”

And it did. It brought back memories of sitting in class, trying to discreetly make his webs without anyone noticing. It brought back memories of pouring over the formula, amending it time and time

again, trying to perfect it. And, when Mr. Stark had offered him an actual Stark Internship, the notebook had become a foundation of what they would work on, its pages containing any ideas Peter would think up in school, jotting them quickly into the notebook, eager for the afternoon lab sessions they would have where they would make his notes a reality. And it brought back memories of a very different boy and of a very different mentor, during a time where aliens weren't a thing to be worried about, during a time where Peter's nightmares consisted mostly of the Homecoming Incident, not memories of a ruined planet and Peter dying, not memories of a battle with Mr. Stark collapsing, his arc reactor fading out, not visions of what Beck's hallucinogen had planted in his head, not memories of what the symbiote had made him do.

"That it does, kid," Mr. Stark agreed, his voice again rescuing Peter out from his sea of memories. His tone seemed to be bittersweet, simultaneously sounding sad and hopeful. He closed the drawer and placed the notebook on the table, flipping through the pages filled with both chemistry notes and various web formulas. "When you were gone, May gave this to me. She talked about wanting to do something to remember you by, to do something for the world to know who you were and what you meant to us. I found myself wanting to do the same listening to her speak and I looked through all of your old notebooks, trying to figure out how to repurpose your webs. And, one day, it just hit me." His flipping of the pages ended, his finger tapping the written note on the last page, the note that had led to Peter spiraling, thinking that his mentor was, in fact, planning on taking his work and passing it off as his own.

Now, though, listening to the grief in his mentor's voice, hearing his words about wanting to remember Peter after his passing, he realized that his thoughts weren't true and nor would they ever be true. They had been encouraged by the seeds Beck had sown, planted by a man who thrived upon manipulation and lies. Mr. Stark wasn't planning on passing the project off as his own. No, he was wanting to make the project to give Peter the credit Mr. Stark had felt that he deserved. And Peter felt guilty for ever thinking badly of his mentor, for believing yet another one of Beck's lies.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Stark," he said softly, letting his sincerity be heard in his voice. His mentor's head shot up from the notebook and latched onto Peter's face, his confusion evident by his furrowed brows. "I-I was snooping around when I was here back in September. I might have found the notebook and saw how you were planning on using them in the medical field." Peter paused, knowing in hindsight that his next words were undoubtedly false. "I-I thought that you were planning on not giving me any credit and that you were going to sell it to other people."

Mr. Stark's face fell and he looked down at the journal on the table in front of him. "Oh, kid," he said softly, his voice breaking as if it hurt him that Peter had thought that at one point in time. "Why did you think that?"

Peter shrugged, picking up a stray pencil from one of the tables. He started to fidget with it, not looking his mentor in the eye. "Beck mentioned that you might do that." With the mention of the man that had almost destroyed their relationship, Mr. Stark's face fell even further if that was possible. "When I saw what you wrote in my old notebook, it just seemed to prove everything that he had told me. I didn't even think that it might be something else, which is why I never said anything about it to you. I'm sor--"

"Kid, please don't apologize," his mentor interrupted. "Seriously, Pete. You are not allowed to apologize from here on out." Peter huffed a bit in amusement. "If anything, *I* should be the one apologizing. This project is something that I should have talked about to you from the very start, immediately when you came back from the dead. So, I'm so--"

"If I'm not allowed to say sorry then neither are you, Mr. Stark," Peter said, this time being the one

to interrupt. “Like you said after I woke up from the fight with Beck, Beck’s the one to blame for all this. If it weren’t for him and his words, I would have never thought badly about the project sitting here.” Peter let Mr. Stark think about his words for a few seconds, waiting as the silence between them stretched. Then, he asked, “So, what else were you thinking about with the webs? I love the idea about them being used in the medical sense, but...”

He continued talking, his questions prompting Mr. Stark to answer back. The man pulled up a folder on FRIDAY’s archives labeled “Webacy,” a name combining two words--“web” and “legacy”--and a name that Peter instantly fell in love with. Thirty minutes later, Pepper found them both engrossed in the project, talking back and forth about the various uses the webs posed and the potential it had. With a smile on her face, she interrupted them, reminding Peter about taking Morgan out trick-or-treating.

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Pepper!” Peter exclaimed, grabbing his spidey suit from where it sat in the corner of the lab. “I almost forgot!” He donned the suit, then, hand-in-hand with Morgan, he and the little girl went around the neighborhood, collecting candy from the very small number of neighbors around Mr. Stark. And, as he walked with the girl, listening to her shout ecstatically to her friends about Spider-Man, hearing the other kids’ shouts of awe, letting their parents take pictures of him with their kids, he couldn’t help but feel happy, to feel hopeful for the future.

Because he truly was. He truly was looking forward to the time he would spend with Mr. Stark, working on Webacy. And he was looking forward to being a part of the life of the girl beside him, being the brother that he wanted to be, rather than the one Mr. Stark had expectations of.

Because he was done with living in the past, done with reminiscing on the time before the Blip. What was important was being here, making new memories and pushing away the time he had missed. Because what he missed wasn’t important, not when he had the chance to make his own memories, with May and Happy in their apartment, with Mr. Stark, Pepper, and Morgan in their family.

He was a part of two families, two families that had mourned him when he had died and were beyond happy to see him resurrected. And it wouldn’t do to distance himself from them like he had done previously. No, it really wouldn’t, he realized, holding the hand of Morgan Stark, taking her out on Halloween night, being the big brother that she had grown up hearing about.

And, like he had known back in the med bay, being held by both of his families, he knew that nothing could ever go wrong, not when he had them close by.

No, everything was--and would be--absolutely perfect.

## **Part Five**

*There's nothing wrong with just a taste of what you paid for*

**End**

...

## **The Ballad of Mona Lisa**

*owl\_lover013*

**End**

And that's all, folks! Before I go, I just want to thank everyone who has read this story and everyone who has left a kudos and/or comment. All of the support I received while posting this story meant the world to me. This story will always have a special spot in my heart as it was the first story I ever finished writing, my first ever fanfiction, and also the first story I have ever posted online. Without it and your unfailing support with the story, I wouldn't be where I am right now. Thank you and know that every single hit, kudos, and comment really, truly made my day. Thank you to everyone and I hope to see you guys soon for the next story!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!